CREATIVITY THROUGH THE EYES OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS IN

URBAN SETTINGS

A Dissertation

by

CLAIRE CARSON BENCKENSTEIN

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Chair of Committee,	Norvella Carter
Committee Members,	Joyce Juntune
	Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan
	Kamala Williams
Head of Department,	Lynn Burlbaw

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to seek an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of six urban elementary and secondary social studies teachers as creative people. The research focused on the relationship between their personal creative characteristics and creativity in their classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers and served as the primary means of data collection. The study was guided by two research questions: (1) How do the selected urban teachers define creativity? (2) How do they encourage creativity in their students? The findings in response to the first research question revealed insights into the varying definitions of creativity; however, each participant believed that creativity involved focusing on the student. As a result, the theme that emerged from this question was: *Freedom to Focus on the Student*. Three major themes that emerged from the second question include (1) *Importance of Teacher Attitude* with the subthemes: (a) *Authenticity*; (b) *Genuinely Cares about Students*; (c) *Genuinely Cares about Teaching*; and, (d) *Genuinely Values Creativity*; (2) *Environment* with the subthemes: (a) *Safe*; (b) *Flexible*; and (c) *Engaging*; and the final major theme (3) *Strategies*. The main conclusions drawn from this research were that the participants shared the following characteristics: they believed in student potential; they held attitudes of authenticity and genuine care about students, teaching, and creativity; they had the ability to create an environment conducive to fostering creativity; and, they had the willingness and skills needed to select and use classroom strategies that encouraged creativity in their students. Based on these results,

recommendations include that there be an emphasis on creativity particularly in urban school districts in the U.S. that includes heightening the awareness and the importance of creativity. Aligned with that recommendation, all stakeholders need to be aware of the limitations to creativity related to external constraints such as curricula, school schedules, and allocation of resources. Teachers should receive training regarding creativity, which includes implementation in college curricula for pre-service teachers and professional development for in-service teachers. Finally, opportunities for collaboration regarding teacher attitudes, the teaching environment, and teaching strategies would benefit teachers and administrators as they work together to foster creativity in classrooms.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all of the teachers who have touched my life. As a daughter of a teacher, my mother was the first educator I observed in practice. Initially, she was a social studies teacher herself but then spent the majority of her career teaching math. As a single mom, she spent evenings and weekends tutoring students in math at our kitchen table. She was always there when they needed her. I observed her remarkable levels of commitment, care, and compassion on a daily basis. As a student and from my first educational experience to the present, I have been fortunate to have teachers who have fostered my love of learning and whose passion for their profession have ignited a similar spark in me. As an educator, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with colleagues who have made me a better teacher because of the example they have set for me. The participants of this study are among them. Finally, I dedicate this study to my most important teachers: the students I was blessed to teach. Thank you all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Does creativity have a place in K-12 classrooms in the United States today? What takes place in classrooms across our nation is ultimately the responsibility of the United States Department of Education (USDE). It identifies needs and problems in U.S. education. It oversees legislation, regulations, and policies aligned with those established issues. The mission of the USDE (2010) is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (2010, paragraph 1). Clearly, the mission statement targets important goals in U.S. education. Is creativity seen as integral to achieving those goals? The mission statement also serves as the foundation for federal, state, and local priorities in U.S. education. Is creativity among those priorities?

The answers to these and other questions regarding creativity can be traced, in part, back to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Supporting the mission of USDE, No Child Left Behind, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), established some of the most significant U.S. educational priorities since its passage. The main priority of NCLB (2002) is, "To close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (2002, Sec. 1 Short Title, An Act). The USDE mission statement and NCLB advocate improving learning and teaching for all children. Again, there is no argument that these are important goals. However, the system of standards, assessments, and accountability that accompanies NCLB has unintended costs. One cost is creativity. In

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2015, the reauthorization of NCLB included changing the name to the Student Success Act in House Bill 5. It remains to be seen whether it will achieve its stated purpose of preparing all students to graduate from high school and to be prepared for either postsecondary education or the workforce. Its impact upon creativity remains to be seen as well.

In 2009 another action at the federal level, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (2009), passed aimed at economic stimulation. As a part of the legislation, the Race to the Top Fund provides financial incentives through grants for states establishing conditions for educational innovation and reform. Again, priorities include standards and assessments intended to improve learning at the nation's lowest-achieving schools. As President Barack Obama said when speaking of this portion of the education reform of the ARRA, "It's time to make education America's national mission" (2009a, Race to the Top Executive Summary, p. 2) by preparing students for college and careers. However, innovation intended to improve student performance focuses on standards, assessments, data management systems, and effective teachers and principals. While promoting "enhanced standards [and] high quality assessments" (Race to the Top, 2009a, p. 3) are important, in reality, they have done little to foster creativity in the classroom. Improving conditions for innovation in the Act deal primarily with staffing, scheduling, budgeting, and the ways in which students are awarded credits. Aside from strategies and practices targeting early childhood learning, the closest connection with creativity in the Act is when it deals with fostering school climates that support student achievement through targeting engagement. Now, in its third phase, the

principles of the Race to the Top Program focus on improvement, outcomes, the quality of programs and reforms rather than compliance and accountability (2009b, Race to the Top Phase 3, Power Point slide 4) as was previously the case. In spite of the USDE declaration that Race to the Top grants have shown improvements in teaching and learning since its implementation (Benchley, 2013), its impact upon instructional innovation remains doubtful. In spite of its effort to raise standards and the quality of assessments, its goals and the participation of only 12 states limit the possibility of it having far reaching impact on the classroom in the near future. Specifically, when Race to the Top results have been analyzed, it has been reported that there is a lack of alignment between the federal mandates, the federal funds, and the goals that states establish that are tied to the grants (Benchley, 2013). As previously stated, the federal government has established important priorities when trying to improve U.S. education; however, creativity continues to be a cost.

The cost to creativity is significant. In fact, the status of creativity in the United States has been described as a crisis (Kim, 2011). According to Kim (2011) as I.Q. scores have been on the rise since 1990, creative thinking scores have been decreasing. Indicators of creativity in our nation's children are declining at a time when momentous change is happening throughout the world. Such change requires innovative responses and people must learn how to work with their intellect and ideas and, as a result, ideas have become the primary commodity (Robinson, 2011). This is a time when creativity should be a priority in U.S. education. In summary, the USDE's mission, the priority of No Child Left Behind, and the Race to the Top do address essential educational goals.

But, as long as creativity is not a priority in U.S. classrooms, many schools across our nation will continue to fail to achieve these established goals and our students will pay the greatest price for the crisis in creativity.

As stated previously, the NCLB system of standards, assessments, and accountability have unintended costs such as creativity. Another cost is time (Bramwell, Reilly, Lilly, Kronish, & Chennabathni, 2011)—time to devote to getting to know students' backgrounds, interests, strengths, and aptitudes like creativity. Time spent getting to know students and building relationships is essential to the educational process. Time is also necessary to establish an environment in which creativity will flourish. With that in mind, the theories upon which this study will be based are: the ethic of care, culturally responsive teaching, and confluence theory of creativity. The ethic of care put forth by Noddings (1984) is the theory that humans are social beings who are deeply impacted by relations with others. The primary concern of the theory is how we enter into, maintain, and foster caring relationships. Or, basically, how we meet others and how we treat them (Noddings, 2003). It is through dialogue, modeling, providing practice, and confirmation that educators hope to teach students how to care for others and how to allow others to care for them (Noddings, 1988). It relates to this study as a foundation for understanding how a teacher, who is a creative person, models care and develops caring relationships with students.

The theoretical framework of this study will also be based on the theory of culturally responsive teaching. As defined by Gay (2010) it is making learning relevant for students by focusing on their "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of

reference, and performance styles" (p. 29) and by teaching to and through their strengths. It is also characterized by 1) acknowledging the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups; 2) building meaningfulness for students by bridging home and school experiences; 3) using a wide variety of instructional strategies addressing different learning styles; 4) teaching students to value their own and each others' cultural heritages; and, 5) incorporating multicultural information in all subjects (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching applies to this study in that it states the importance of relevant learning in order for education to be a more positive and meaningful experience for urban students.

The final theory in the theoretical framework is Sternberg and Lubart's (1996) investment theory of creativity. It states that multiple components converge when creativity takes place thereby making it a confluence theory. In this theory, when it comes to ideas, creative people are those who "buy low and sell high" (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996, p. 683). What it means to buy ideas low is pursuing ideas that have potential for growth in spite of the fact there may be little known about them or they may not be in favor. These creative people may continue to hold onto the idea in spite of resistance then sell high. At that time, the person may pick up another idea that is new or seemingly unpopular. Just as with the buying and selling of stocks, timing is everything. Such is the case with the investment theory as well. If a person "buys" too soon or sells too late, creativity may be thwarted. In other words, if an idea is presented too early—it may be premature—or if an idea is held onto too long thereby becoming commonplace, then it's no longer creative. Investment theory requires six distinct,

interrelated resources in confluence. They are "intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation, and environment" (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996, p. 683). Of intellectual abilities, three are particularly important: (a) the synthetic ability which is the ability to escape conventional thinking to see problems in new and different ways; (b) the analytic ability is being able to assess the value of ideas and deciding which ones to pursue based on that assessment; and (c) the practical-contextual ability is the ability to sell ideas to others. The amount of knowledge plays a role in creativity; too much or too little can be stifling. When it comes to thinking, one should think well, think in new ways, and be able to discern important issues from those that are not important. The motivation must be intrinsic and focused on the task, and, the environment must support and reward creativity. As a confluence theory, the investment theory explains these components individually and the way in which they work in concert as they relate to creativity (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996, p. 684). It is because of that explanation of the interrelated resources that this theory was selected as a theoretical perspective for this study. In combination, these theories were chosen because they identify the nuances of creativity from the perspective of teachers in urban school settings.

Education is meant to develop and build upon our innate abilities; however, it is often at the center of the problem. Students who have high academic abilities and students who have lower academic abilities may have abilities that are underdeveloped, underappreciated, or undiscovered. The results can be children who feel disenchanted with school because their passion is never discovered or children who feel that they are failures (Robinson, 2011). Research shows that teachers who have experienced this in

their own educations may direct this dissatisfaction toward creative advocacy (Beghetto & Beghetto, 2011). I am one of those people. My story becomes a more meaningful prelude to my research interest when it's viewed through the lens of the theoretical framework of this study. My passion for learning developed late. However, like the ethic of care, caring relationships allowed me to persevere even when I felt like a failure. Similar to culturally relevant teaching, when I was taught to and through my strengths, I became a confident learner. It was through those caring relationships, the opportunity to learn through my strengths, and the encouragement to think in new ways that my passion for learning was ignited. My passion for learning was sparked by those experiences and fueled since by creativity. My advocacy for creativity continued to grow during my 31 years as an educator in a single district as it transitioned from suburban to urban, and, as the emphasis on standardized assessments grew, the number of students who appeared disenchanted with education increased as well. During that time I came to know creative urban teachers who continued to reach their students by engaging them in rich classroom experiences. It is their stories that will be explored in this study.

Statement of the Problem

There is a growing need for understanding creative teachers in urban schools. In spite of the USDE's (2010) mission statement that includes ensuring equal access to educational excellence, the system of standards, assessments, and accountability that accompanies NCLB (2002) encourages practices that run contrary to those goals. Particularly, in urban schools where accountability is the greatest, the preoccupation with basic skills, tested content, and teacher-directed instruction (Noguera, 2009),

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students are denied equal access to educational excellence. Considering the practices that exist in many urban schools today, it is imperative to understand the educational excellence that does occur in urban schools, particularly through the voices of teachers who are creative persons. As a result, the impact of the creative teacher on students in an urban school district can be acknowledged and appreciated.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to seek an in-depth understanding of six urban teachers as creative people. The research focused on the relationship between these teachers' personal creative characteristics and creativity in the classroom.

Significance of the Study

Creativity is a topic of significant scope and importance at both individual and societal levels yet it has been a relatively neglected research topic (Sternberg, 2009). This oversight is evident in education where the literature on creativity is primarily concerned with creativity in students' and teachers' roles supporting them (Bramwell et al., 2011) and some research exists that has examined creative pedagogy (Craft, Jeffrey, & Leibling, 2001; Sawyer, 2004); however, few studies have examined creative teachers themselves (Bramwell et al., 2011), their views and perceptions of creativity, and its promotion in children in spite of their importance in the learning process (Fryer & Collings, 1991; Soh, 2000). This dearth of research is hard to imagine considering successful teaching relies on teachers' creativity (Bramwell et al., 2011). There is also a void on the lived stories and experiences of urban teachers who are creative people that can inform others about creativity in urban education. These voices can provide a better

understanding of how they maintain their creativity particularly when creativity is not a priority. Unlike the current top-down approach to educational reform, this study and its outcomes may encourage teachers to have a degree of personal ownership related to their creativity (Woods, 1995; Bramwell et al., 2011). As a result, the impact of the creative person teaching in an urban setting can be acknowledged and appreciated. This study added to the literature by providing information to school districts, administrators, and teachers so they can recognize the value of creativity in urban education.

Research Questions

The following questions served as guides for the study:

1. How do the selected urban teachers define creativity?
2. How do they encourage creativity in their students?

Definition of Terms

Creativity - As defined by the individualist approach to creativity research, creativity is when a new mental combination is expressed (Sawyer, 2012, p. 7).

Elementary school – A school for young children between the ages of four and 12 in the first seven grades including pre-kindergarten and kindergarten (Braham, 1996).

Middle school – A school for children between the ages of 12 and 14 that includes grades six to eight (Braham, 1996).

High school – A school students attend from the ages of 14 and 18 in grades 9-12 (Braham, 1996).

Intermediate grades – The upper elementary school grades (3-5) (Houston, 2001).

Primary grades – The first grades of elementary school from pre-kindergarten through grade 2 (Braham, 1996).

Rural – Is a delineation of a geographical area encompassing the territory, population, and housing not included within an urban area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

School district – An area, or unit of administration that contains schools overseen by a school board (Braham, 1996).

Secondary school – A term used to refer to the combination of middle school grades (6-8) and high school grades (9-12) for children between the ages of 12 and 18 (Braham, 1996).

Suburban – A community adjacent to a large city (Braham, 1996).

Social studies – The curricula devoted to the study of social relationships and the functioning of society that consists of courses such as anthropology, economics, geography, government, history, psychology, and sociology (Braham, 1996).

Teacher – A person whose job is to teach students about particular subjects (Braham, 1996).

Urban – A term used for a geographical delineation of an area that comprises a densely settled core and adjacent territory linked to the core (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Urban school district – Based on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2006) school locale classification system, an urban school district is defined more on proximity to an urbanized area and less on population.

Voice – As a framework, voice is a tool used to identify and analyze the set of textual signs including personal and professional life experiences that may characterize the

narrator through the reflection of their beliefs, values, needs, and concerns (Schwandt, 2001).

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Historically, the relationship between creativity and education in the U.S. can best be described as, "on again, off again" (Smith & Smith, 2010, p. 251). As will be discussed in this chapter, a greater emphasis was placed on creativity during the 1960s and not since the 1980s. The changing nature of the relationship between creativity and education can be better understood by examining the literature on the barriers to creativity, the stimulants of creativity, and the role of creativity in teachers. However, it is most appropriate to begin with a look at the state of creativity in U.S. schools and specifically schools in urban settings where creative teaching practices are often replaced by the popular use of instruction that is scripted (Sawyer, 2004).

Creativity in U.S. Education

After World War II shifting international relations proved to be a catalyst for creativity. The Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union was a period of intense rivalry between the two countries. Many points of comparison proved to be fodder for the rivalry and education was one of them. Beginning in the mid-1950s, U.S. education began to be closely examined for fear that the Soviets were gaining superiority, particularly in the field of science. This fear escalated with the successful launching of Sputnik, a satellite that symbolized Soviet supremacy in education. Sputnik marked a turning point in U.S. education. As a result, in 1958 the National Defense Education Act, legislation aimed at comprehensive educational reform, focused

on improving the areas of science, math, foreign languages, and creativity by strengthening teacher practices in the classroom (Dow, 1999). The National Science Foundation (NSF) led major efforts to promote science education including reforming and promoting research in the field. The NSF also oversaw teacher training and the development of materials and encouraged innovation through the dissemination of ideas and programs. During the same period, educators were reexamining the connection between scholarship and teaching and the nature of the learning process. Approaches and methods used in the classroom were also under scrutiny. Conventional teaching methods were replaced with self-directed instructional strategies designed to stimulate inquiry and creativity (Dow, 1999). Creative methods and approaches to come later were based upon these innovations (Esquivel, 1995).

The "open classroom movement" (Esquivel, 1995, p. 187) in the 1960s also promoted creativity through innovative changes in instructional arrangements and teaching methods. Team teaching was one of the innovations implemented in the open classrooms. Efforts were made to make learning more active through differing instructional arrangements such as individualized instruction, cooperative learning, and independent learning. A major goal of the movement was promoting creative thinking (Walberg & Thomas, 1972; Wright, 1975) and the innovative methods introduced were aligned with that goal (Esquivel, 1995). A review of the effectiveness of open classroom practices (Horwitz, 1979) found that most efforts resulted in creative development. And, the gains in creativity were not at the expense of achievement. Torrance and Goff (1989) viewed this as a revolutionary time that resulted in creative expression and

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problem solving, a time that continues to influence education positively today. The strengths and creative characteristics of disadvantaged children and children of culturally diverse backgrounds were also given attention during this period (Esquivel, 1995).

In the 1970s, the public mood toward education reform was more conservative, due to U.S. achievements in space, and there was a corresponding decrease in interest in curriculum reform in regular education (Dow, 1999). At the same time, the gifted child movement encouraged the development of programs specially designed for that student population and the implementation of creative approaches and techniques (Davis, 1998). A survey(Yarborough & Johnson, 1983) identified gifted and talented programs, and found 109 outstanding programs in the 36 State Departments of Education that responded (Esquivel, 1995).

During the 1980s questions about the quality of teaching were moved up the national agenda once again as a result of lower achievement test scores and overall declining school performance. Goodlad (1984) reported in research on teacher performance that traditional methods, focusing on basic skills and rote learning, were used by regular classroom teachers more frequently than higher-level thinking skills and creativity. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) examined the problem and described the state of education as a "nation at risk" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and emphasized the "rising tide of mediocrity" (p. 112) in U.S. schools.

In spite of the gains in creativity during the 1960s and 1970s, the back to basics mentality of the 1980s has continued through legislation such as NCLB that

deemphasized learning and did not contribute directly to literacy and numeracy gains (Smith & Smith, 2010). There has doubtlessly been emphasis on creativity in the United States during certain periods of time and in particular areas like early childhood and gifted and talented education; however, since the 1990s the trend toward developing students' creative potential has largely taken place in other countries (Craft, 2007) and creativity remains in crisis in the United States (Kim, 2011).

Considering the state of creativity in the nation, Sternberg (Sternberg, 2009) voiced the concern that elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. stress memory-based and analytical aspects of intelligence and that NCLB has increased the emphasis. These skills are not enough (Sternberg, Reznitskaya, & Jarvin, 2007). Sternberg, Reznitskaya, and Jarvin (2007) explain that we are leading our students down the wrong road by focusing on high stakes tests that measure things that really do not matter in the long run. Sternberg goes on to make the connection that the emphasis on memory-based and analytical aspects of intelligence are at the expense of creative, practical, and wisdom-based ones, arguably the skills one needs the most in later life. He goes on to point out the inadequacies of some of our nation's top leaders in politics, business, and the military and explains that good leadership is the synthesis of intelligence, wisdom, and creativity. He makes the case for preparing our nation's citizens and leaders with the wisdom they will need to face the problems of our world, our nation, and our schools. The purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge and skills but also to develop a student's ability to use their knowledge and skills most effectively (Sternberg et al., 2007). Sternberg answers the question of how one teaches for intelligence, wisdom, and

creativity. He explains that teaching for creativity means encouraging students to create, discover, and imagine. But, he goes farther to stress the importance of teachers, encouraging creativity but also supporting it, rewarding it, and modeling it themselves. Sternberg et al. (2007) call this "teaching for wisdom" (p. 143). If our nation's education focus is to shift from memory-based to wisdom-based by teaching for creativity, it will require clarity when defining the meaning of creativity.

Defining everyday commonplace terms that exist in the social sciences one would think would be easy; however, defining creativity is very difficult. In order to gain an understanding, one could look to the two main approaches to creativity research—the individualist and the sociocultural. Creativity is defined somewhat differently by each of the traditions. The individualist approach focuses on a single person engaged in creative thought or behavior. Because the individualists' interests lie with the single person, the individualists' definition deals only with structures and processes as they relate to one person. Sawyer (2012) explains the individualist definition of creativity as " a new mental combination that is expressed in the world" (p. 7). "Creativity is *new*" (p. 7). For a thought or action to be considered creative, the most basic requirement is that it must be novel or original. When involved in already mastered behavioral patterns like driving a familiar route to work, one is involved in a non-creative activity. "Creativity is a *combination*" (p. 7). Thoughts and concepts are simply a combination of already existing thoughts and concepts. When, an individual, for their first time, combines thoughts and concepts then creativity is involved. "Creativity is *expressed in the world*" (p. 7). An idea that is not expressed cannot be seen, studied, nor

understood. This explains why the scientific definition of creativity must exclude ideas that remain in a person's head. To further clarify, under the individualist definition, the combinations that are being made need not be new associations to the world; the combinations only need to be new to the individual to be considered creative. This everyday creativity is termed "little c creativity" (Sawyer, 2012, p. 7) by creativity researchers.

To the contrary, the sociocultural tradition does not focus on the creative individual. Instead, the sociocultural approach studies people as they work together in cultural or social systems. In this tradition, the creative thought or behavior generated by a group and the organizational, social, and cultural systems involved are examined. The social-cultural definition of creativity is "the generation of a product that is judged to be novel and also to be appropriate, useful, or valuable by a suitably knowledgeable social group" (Sawyer, 2012, p. 8). Unlike the individualist definition that states that the combinations are new only to the creator, the sociocultural definition requires that the product must have social value – or value to the social group – in order to be creative. These criteria align with the creative genius of "Big-C" (Sawyer, 2012) creativity. As Sawyer (2012) clarifies, this meets the definition of the everyday creative acts of "little-c" creativity by default. As Torrance (1963) explains, creativity may only require small changes in thinking as is the case with "little c" creativity or monumental changes in thinking may be warranted like in "Big-C" creativity. He also explains that the definition of creativity may be related to a process, product, personality, or environment. According to Torrance, his definition of creativity, "the process of sensing problems or

gaps in information, forming ideas or hypotheses, testing and modifying these hypotheses, and communicating the results" (pp. 7-8) subsumes the major elements of other definitions of creativity. This study will examine the individual's expressions of thoughts and behaviors that are new to them; the individualist approach and definition is most appropriate.

Creativity in U.S. Urban Schools

In U.S. schools, in general, the fluctuating relationship between creativity and education may be attributed to educational policy makers traditionally neglecting creativity (Beghetto, 2010). In U.S. urban schools, in particular, it may be the result of misguided efforts to increase student achievement that has resulted in restrictions and limitations on both curriculum and pedagogy (Haberman, 1991; Crocco & Costigan, 2007) rather than offering a transformative education to empower urban students with the "knowledge, skills, and values" (Banks, 1991, p. 131) they need and deserve.

In the USDE's 1996 study (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996) on urban schools, national data was used to compare students and schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The findings were broken down into "student characteristics, student background characteristics and afterschool activities, school experiences, and student outcomes" (Lippman et al., 1996, pp. v-ix). The study established that urban schools face significant challenges that are not found in either suburban or rural schools. Urban students were more likely to live in poverty, more likely to speak English as a second language, and more likely to experience health and safety risks. As far as students' backgrounds were concerned, their parents were supportive of positive educational

outcomes; however, they were lacking the stability of both the family and economic structure at home. A wide range of school attributes was examined in the study. Among them was school size. Urban schools were found to have larger enrollments. Teachers had fewer resources and less control over the curriculum. Administrators of urban schools were found to have difficulty with hiring teachers. Teacher absenteeism, a morale indicator, was higher in urban schools. Other challenges included student behavior problems, student absenteeism, weapons possession, and teen pregnancy. Urban students were less likely to feel safe. They spent less time on homework than suburban or rural students and watched television excessively. The urban high poverty schools were undeniably found to have more challenges to overcome than did the schools in either of the other two areas (Lippman et al., 1996). Most urban schools with these challenges are public schools. According to the *Projections of Education Statistics to 2020* (Hussar & Bailey, 2011) based on the 2000 census, public school enrollment in 40 states is projected to be higher than it was in 2010. Public school enrollment by race/ethnicity is projected to decrease for students who are White and increase for Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native and students who are two or more races. When these studies (Lippman et al., 1996; Hussar & Bailey, 2011) are combined, the importance of understanding and ameliorating the obstacles facing urban schools on national, state, and local levels becomes even clearer. If the number of public schools in urban centers increases and the issues confronting these schools goes unabated, then it is more likely that a growing number of students will be ill prepared for their futures.

What does learning look like in urban schools? As previously mentioned, in urban schools teachers report having fewer resources, less control over the curriculum, and more teacher absenteeism – all of which may affect instruction (Lippman et al., 1996). In urban settings, almost every type of pedagogy exists; however, there has been reliance on a set of acts that Haberman (1991) labeled the "pedagogy of poverty" (p. 291). These practices call for teacher direction and student control and compliance. Among the pedagogy of poverty acts that are at the core of urban teaching are the teacher; giving information, directions, assignments, and tests; reviewing assignments, homework, and tests; settling disputes and punishing noncompliance; and, grading papers and assigning grades (Haberman, 1991, p. 291). When the pedagogy of poverty is implemented, the teacher is the person responsible for learning rather than the student. In spite of this misplaced responsibility, many urban teachers support these practices. In fact, according to Haberman, in the 1990s any teacher who did not use these as the primary tools in their instructional toolbox, would be thought of as a "deviant" (Haberman, 1991, p. 291).

Multiple constituencies support the pedagogy of poverty. According to Haberman (1991), those who did not do well in school support the pedagogy of poverty along with those people who place common sense above thoughtful analysis. The pedagogy of poverty may also appeal to those who feel the need to control, such as people who fear or have low expectations for students from underserved groups and the poor. Finally, those with limited knowledge of pedagogical options may support it. Haberman (1991) noted, "People with limited vision frequently see value in limited and

limiting forms of pedagogy" (Haberman, 1991, p. 291). Not only do many teachers support this type of instruction but frequently urban students do as well. In spite of the authoritarian, controlling atmosphere, students often find the status quo less risky than a system in which they would be held accountable. Many students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the public have come to accept this type of methodology in urban schools. Unfortunately, it does not work. Too frequently, urban schools try to make students learn by fitting them into a pedagogy instead of using instructional practices designed around students' needs. As Haberman stated it's pedagogy of "stuffing in" (p. 294) rather than "drawing out" (p. 294). However, there are urban teachers who refuse to equate their competence with student control; discipline is an outcome of effective instruction (Haberman, 1991). These effective urban teachers are not willing to join the other stakeholders who narrow their responsibility in order to decrease their own liability and ensure their own success. They are intent on drawing the best out of their students. They are intent on helping their students recognize their potential.

In 1969, Torrance examined the issue of awakening the unrecognized potential of disadvantaged children. While he was optimistic about the possibilities of uncovering talent potential among disadvantaged students, he questioned just how realistic a dream it was. He underscored the magnitude of the challenge when he stated that it was not possible at the time to estimate accurately the amount of potential lost each year. His work focused on the creative positives of the disadvantaged youth (Torrance, 1969).

The work on extraordinary potentialities among disadvantaged children and youth that extended back to the 1960s (Bruch, 1975; Torrance, 1963; 1965; 1966; 1969; Witt, 1968), though limited, proved to be exciting. Issues related to unrecognized potential became apparent. First, the problem of identifying and cultivating only the talents of the advantaged dominant culture was an issue. Another challenge was looking for and cultivating the types of talents that were valued by the cultures to which the disadvantaged youth belonged. Initial success was seen in the identification of talents among disadvantaged students in the areas of athletics, music, dance, drama, and visual art. In spite of this success, even in these areas, talent was neglected (Torrance, 1969). The nature of the talent assessments was another challenge. Rather than being asked to respond in terms of their personal cultural experiences, disadvantaged youth were subjected to talent tests using terms of the advantaged culture. Most tests of creativity, such as the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance, 1966) called upon disadvantaged children to respond using their own lived experiences. This increased the likelihood of responses and evaluation that were more closely aligned with the child's experiences. Talent identification instruments were not the only problems. There was also the challenge of motivating children to display their potential by making them feel safe. Bruch (1975) made another important point. She contended that for the identification of the disadvantaged it should not be based upon their current performance on intelligence or achievement tests, but whether there were indices of probable development to levels higher than those at which they were functioning originally. She suggested that when a disadvantaged student displayed exceptional talent in a culturally

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valued area, music for example, a developmental program could be designed to for latent thinking processes needed in academic areas.

Torrance (1969) identified creative positives that occur among disadvantaged youth "high non-verbal fluency; high creative productivity in small groups; adept in visual art activities; highly creative in movement, dance, and other physical activities; highly motivated by games music, sports, humor, and concrete objects; language rich in imagery" (p.75). These high occurring characteristics (Torrance, 1963; 1965; 1966; 1969) were at the foundation of building successful educational programs designed to awaken many potentialities. When identifying gifted disadvantaged students, Torrance (1969) recommended seeking students in these areas rather than traditional means to assure greater success. Torrance stressed that while creativity development is important in awakening unrecognized potential, there are other significant considerations such as ensuring that students' basic physiological and psychological needs are met. For example, unrecognized potential in students will not be awakened if they do not experience respect, self-esteem, and love. The kinds of experiences made possible by teachers who demonstrate care in their relations with them (Noddings, 1995).

In spite of the accepted need for developing unrecognized potential in disadvantaged students (Bruch, 1975; Torrance, 1963; Torrance, 1969; Torrance, 1966), research shows that urban students whose creative needs are not met are likely to quit high school (Kim & Hull, 2012). High school drop out rates, important indicators of unrecognized potential, have been a national concern for years. USDE statistics (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011) regarding drop out rates indicate some

signs of improvement; however, the data by race, ethnicity, and income may still raise concerns in urban districts. Black and Latina/o students were more likely to drop out and students living in low-income families were significantly more likely to quit school. As a result, many urban schools organize district-wide visits to the homes of students who have not attended school in a long time. This is just one of the ways schools are trying to encourage students to come back to school and thereby improve the problem. Drop out can be a difficult issue to tackle since there are many reasons why students quit school. Reasons might be related to issues outside of school or inside of school. In 2012, Kim and Hull undertook research examining the possible connection between creativity and students dropping out of high school. Their research combined high school data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and a low income area in Michigan. Kim and Hull (2012) cleared up the misconception that students drop out because they are low-achieving academically or because they have support or financial issues. Their research found that students drop out because they simply don't like school. Kim (2008b) stated that students frequently become underachievers when their creative needs are not met. They also found that as students' creativity increases so do the chances that they would drop out. Of course, they stressed that just because a student is highly creative does not ensure they will drop out; however, the results indicate that students' creative personalities may relate to their decision to drop out before completing their high school education. Kim and Hull (2012) discussed the importance of keeping students engaged academically and with other school-related activities in order to keep creative students enrolled in school.

One area of concern about creativity in urban settings relates to the traits of creative potential. If student control and compliance is at the core of the learning environment (Haberman, 1991), students' traits of persistent questioning, independence, and nonconformity may be not be tolerated, thereby discouraging their creativity. Runco (1993) states the value to educators "tolerating, encouraging, rewarding and modeling these characteristics themselves through originality, spontaneity, and independent thinking" (p. 1). However, there is reason to be optimistic about the creative potential of at-risk and disadvantaged urban students. Creative potential is widely distributed. As a result, students who do not excel in school may have high levels of creative potential. In fact, rarely can it be predicted based on academic performance, verbal ability, or IQ scores. Another reason to be optimistic is because of the important role of motivation. It follows that understanding the significance of motivation when it comes to creativity will enable educators to positively intervene. Finally, the fact that creativity can be displayed in such diverse ways if students are allowed to follow their interests is another reason to be optimistic about the creative potential for students in urban schools (Runco, 1993).

Teacher Perceptions of Creativity

In spite of the role of teachers in fostering creativity in students, there has been a lack of research investigating teachers' views and perceptions of creativity and its development in students (Fryer & Collings, 1991; Soh, 2000). With that in mind, a study by Fryer and Collins (1991) focused on the subject of teacher perceptions of creativity. The goal of the causal comparative research (Fryer & Collings, 1991) was to

systematically examine British teachers' perceptions and attitudes about creativity and to study the factors involved with variations in those perceptions and attitudes. The sample of 1,028 teachers represented both genders (female, male). It was an opportunity sample that was very broadly based. Teachers with varying years of experience taught students ranging from ages five to eighteen. A diversity of school subjects was included. There were three parts to the study: a questionnaire survey, interviews, and a school survey. All teachers in the sample answered the questionnaire. It was designed to measure how teachers defined creativity and their beliefs about positive or negative influences on creative behavior in children. It also examined their thoughts on the appropriate ways for indentifying creative students and creative schoolwork. Teachers' opinions of educational goals and objectives were elicited along with their opinions of teaching methods and teaching style preferences. Interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of 31 teachers in order to obtain detailed qualitative information on their perceptions of, and attitudes towards, creativity. The head of each school completed the school surveys, which were intended to examine any association that might exist between attitudes about creativity and school factors. According to the majority of the British teachers in the study, creativity involved imagination, original ideas, and self-expression. When comparing teacher views, significant differences emerged between the views of male and female teachers. Female teachers described creativity as being personal, whereas male teachers characterized it in more impersonal, objective terms. The different proportions of males and females were controlled for inter-subject analysis. Statistically significant differences were also revealed when responses were analyzed in relation to

the subjects teachers taught. Those teaching general courses (non-specialists), English, and the creative arts interpreted creativity in more personal terms and those teaching math, science, and technology interpreted it in more impersonal, objective terms.

The purpose of a study undertaken by Fleith (2000) was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students regarding stimulants and obstacles for the development of creativity in the classroom. Seven Connecticut elementary public school teachers, 31 students (grades 3 and 4), and seven creativity experts participated in the qualitative study. The teacher interview topics included a definition of creativity, and activities, strategies, and the classroom environment that enhance students' creativity. The teachers' definition of creativity included process, person, and environment. The process category included a novel and different approach to the routine procedures or previous ideas. The person category included the ability to express themselves in ways that make sense to themselves. Environment was included as an important variable in fostering creativity. Regarding the environment, participants reported that three components contributed to the development of creativity. The components were teachers' attitudes, strategies, and activities. Teachers' attitudes mentioned were allowing students choices, accepting students as they are, boosting their self-confidence, and not imposing things on students.

Since 1994, the Cypriot National Curriculum has included creativity as an educational objective at the elementary level. In order to reach the goals specified in the national curriculum, Diakidoy and Phtiaka (2001) led a study to emphasize the important role played by teachers in facilitating creativity. The purpose of the study was to

examine the beliefs of elementary teachers regarding aspects and outcomes of creativity as they were directly related to educational practices (Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2001). In this quantitative study, 98 elementary teachers were selected from rural, suburban, and urban schools. Teachers in the sample responded to a two-part survey. The first part of the survey included open-ended items and sentence-completion items related to how teachers defined creativity, identified creativity and creative outcomes in school, characterized creative people, and their beliefs regarding the facilitation of creativity in school in general, and, specifically, in history. The subject choice of history was made because of the researchers' belief that it afforded the least amount of flexibility for teachers and students. The second part of the survey asked that teachers agree or disagree with items designed to bring forth their beliefs about creativity, the extent of its manifestations, its outcomes and its connection to factors such as prior knowledge. Survey items also addressed intelligence and achievement in school. The majority of teachers sampled conceptualized creativity as a person's ability or a process leading to outcomes that are novel or unexpected. Their definitions of creativity also included thinking differently, a unique perspective, and self-expression. Going beyond the given adding to something that already exists, producing something original. and discovering something new were responses offered by teachers when defining creativity. Half of the respondents suggested that a high level of prior knowledge was a prerequisite for creativity. The majority also suggested that creativity does not require a high level of intelligence nor did they indicate that creativity requires extraordinary thinking processes or extraordinary ability. Participants explained creativity as an ability that

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extends knowledge and involves using knowledge and skills to generate something unique. They also identified it as an ability to take advantage of situations in constructive ways and by responding in an imaginative and original way thereby finding new ways to solve problems. Finally, the teachers indicated that creative thinking is like the thinking required to solve problems in daily life.

In a study of teaching creative writing to children in Hong Kong primary schools, Cheung, Tse, and Tsang (2003) compared the responses of teachers regarding their views and practices concerning creativity. Aligned with that purpose, a cohort of 449 Chinese language teachers responded to a 14-item questionnaire in this comparative study regarding their views of creativity, their perceptions of how to develop their students' creativity, their awareness of strategies for creative writing, and creative writing teaching practices. The terms relevant to teacher beliefs that were used were views, perceptions, and awareness. The major findings related to how the teachers viewed creativity included the following elements of creativity: imagination, divergent thinking, and inspiration. Of the three elements, inspiration was found to be a defining one.

Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) undertook a study to investigate teachers' conceptions of creativity and creative students. In this qualitative study, 36 elementary teachers at four schools in a small Idaho town responded to a questionnaire about creativity. Results indicated that, in general, teachers were positive about creativity. The characteristics of creativity identified by teachers frequently agreed with the characteristics identified by creativity researchers but the weight assigned by

teachers to the characteristics differed from those of the experts. The most frequently occurring definition given by the teachers was original ideas, followed by aesthetic product, then intelligence. It was indicated in this study that teachers were often unaware of the importance of divergent thinking, fluency, flexibility, or elaboration. Studies on teachers' perceptions of creativity demonstrate teachers offer varied definitions of creativity.

The literature is optimistic regarding teacher perceptions of the importance of creativity. Feldhusen and Treffinger (1975) reported that teachers believe creativity to be an important educational goal. Craft (1998) undertook a study of 18 educators enrolled in an experimental graduate course designed to support their ability to foster student creativity across the curriculum. The participants had varied work experience. This qualitative research tracked the experiences and perceptions of the teachers resulting in themes highlighting the participants' perceptions of manifesting creativity in learners and suggesting potentially core means for fostering educators' belief in their ability to foster creativity in students across the curriculum. The patterns of responses appeared to be from a position of belief in creativity as a positive thing. However, teacher stance towards creativity and creative learning indicated that teachers of younger students appeared to expect and value creative learning more than teachers of older students. In other research (Cheung et al., 2003) of Chinese language teachers of primary school students it was apparent that participants thought creativity was important as well because of the value they placed upon it.

A qualitative study undertaken by Craft, Cremin, Burnard, and Chappell (2007) in England involved eight teachers from four schools: three primary and one secondary. The two curriculum areas selected were music and English. It was a co-participative case study over a 12-month period based on three sets of data that included interviews, observations, and documents. The intent was to explore how the progression in creative learning could be described in the two subject areas. The purpose of the research was to explore the teachers' stances toward creativity and creative teaching and learning. Three areas of teacher stance were studied. They were teachers' stance toward learner engagement; creativity and creative learning; and teaching for creative learning. Regarding stance toward creativity and creative learning, teachers at all levels were found to value understanding each student as an individual, increasing the child's artistic voice over time, and improving the learner's ability to evaluate. These findings also support the importance of creativity from the perspective of educators.

The study by Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) to investigate elementary teachers' conceptions of creativity and creative students had findings similar to Craft (1998) indicating that, in general, teachers were positive about creativity. The majority stated that fostering creativity is viewed as important in their school. Teachers also reported that creativity is essential to support students' academic achievement and that teachers should be knowledgeable about creativity. Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds also considered the importance of creativity in relation to academic achievement. Their findings indicated that the responsibilities related to course content

might cause teachers to view creativity as a lower priority thereby offering less creative opportunities.

In a mixed methods study, Kampylis, Berki, and Saariluoma (2009) examined the conceptions of creativity held by 70 primary in-service teachers and 62 pre-service teachers in Greece. The three research questions related to the teachers' conceptions and theories of creativity in general; their conceptions and theories of creativity in the context of primary education; and, to how well prepared they felt they were to play an instrumental role in developing students' creative potential. Regarding the first question, the study revealed that teachers conceptualized creativity as a key factor to both individual and social progress. It is evident from the majority of studies related to teachers' perceptions of creativity that they perceive it to be important.

On the topic of teachers' perceptions of creativity, the issue of who teachers characterize as being creative is a noteworthy one. Creative people have been characterized as being impulsive, nonconformist, and free-spirited as opposed to less creative people who have been described as dependable and responsible (Dawson, D'Andrea, Affinito, & Westby, 1999). Considering these characteristics, it might not be surprising that research beginning over forty years ago has found that teachers dislike students who display the creative personality characteristics (Torrance, 1963; Bachtold, 1974; Westby & Dawson, 1995). This research is surprising since it runs contrary to the fact that teachers believe creativity is an important educational goal (Feldhusen & Treffinger, 1975). It is this paradox between teachers' self-reports that they enjoy teaching creative students and the research findings that teachers dislike characteristics

like nonconformity that are traditionally associated with creativity that Dawson et al. (1999) set out to understand. In the study (Dawson et al., 1999), the predictive utility of the traditional concepts of creative personality were compared to the teacher-defined concepts of the creative personality as they related to the creative performances of 27 elementary school students. Teachers first rated each student's personality characteristics, then each of the ratings were compared to two concepts of creative personality—one reflected the traditional views of creativity and the other reflected teachers' views of creativity. Teachers knew that the study dealt with students' personality characteristics and school activities; however, they did not know that creativity was specifically involved. Differences were evident when the teachers' lists of characteristics were compared to the traditional creativity descriptors. Items at the top of the traditional list were at the bottom of the teacher lists and some of the teacher items related more to good citizenship than creativity. Teacher's students then produced two creative products: a collage—a figural task; and a story—a verbal task, that were then evaluated by three sets of judges. They (Dawson et al., 1999) found that the traditional creativity personality characteristics predicted creative behavior on the figural task but not on the verbal task. The opposite was true of the teacher-defined characteristics of creativity. The teacher personality profile predicted creative behavior on the verbal task but not on the figural one. According to the judges, students who best fit the teacher prototype wrote the most creative stories. This study examined the differing concepts of creativity, specifically, the traditional prototype of creativity versus the teacher prototype of creativity. The findings helped to resolve the issues related to the relation between

teachers' views of creativity and students' creative performance. The traditional characteristics of creativity did predict figural creativity and the teacher characteristics of creativity did predict verbal creativity. The researchers cautioned that using only the traditional prototype does teachers a disservice. Their findings suggest that teachers may simply be sensitive to a certain type of creativity. This might help explain the disparity between teachers' beliefs that creativity is important and their apparent dislike of creative students (Dawson et al., 1999).

Data in a study by Diakidoy and Phtiaka (2001) indicated that characteristics that were not required of creative people were a high level of intelligence, extraordinary ability, and extraordinary thinking; however, participants believed that a high level of prior knowledge was a prerequisite to think creatively in order to solve problems of daily life. This study indicated that teachers conceptualize creativity as a general ability and a source of individual differences that is defined in terms of novel outcomes. They did not believe creativity to be a rarely occurring phenomenon nor for the individual differences in creativity to be large. The teachers considered all children to be creative.

When responding to items about conceptions of creative students, the characteristics of creativity identified by the teachers in a study by Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) frequently agreed with the characteristics identified by creativity researchers, but the weight assigned by teachers to the characteristics differed from those of the experts. Teachers also confused the characteristics of high achieving students with those of creative students. Participants' descriptions of the characteristics of creative students were also barriers to creativity since they identified students as

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creative if their characteristics were likeable. For example, teachers did not include characteristics like independence of judgment, courage, and curiosity that might be perceived as challenges to the teachers' authority. An important finding was that teachers mentioned both positive and negative traits when they were asked to recall a specific student they had taught whereas they only mentioned positive characteristics when speaking of creative students in general.

In their examination of the conceptions of creativity held by teachers in Greece, Kampylis, Berki, and Saariluoma (2009) reported the belief that it can be developed in everyone. However, half of the participants believed that only a few of their students were gifted creatively. The researchers summarized that based on this study, the participants held contradictory conceptions of creativity and they work to arrive at consistent theories of the concept of creativity. The research findings regarding teachers' perceptions of creativity as it relates to the characteristics of creative students are mixed.

Study results on teachers' beliefs regarding the prevalence of creativity range widely from creativity being rare to creativity being a characteristic held by the majority of students. Fryer and Collins (1991) investigated the subject of teacher perceptions of creativity at a time when British creativity education focused on the gifted, and so not surprisingly, nearly three quarters of the teachers thought creativity was rare. To the contrary, the Greek elementary teachers responding to aspects and outcomes of creativity related directly to educational practices, but did not believe creativity to be a rarely occurring phenomenon nor for the individual differences in creativity to be large

(Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2001). As a result, they expected creativity to occur frequently in their classrooms in a variety of situations. Another group of elementary teachers responded similarly in Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynold's (2005) research investigating teachers' conceptions of creativity and creative students. In this Idaho study, questionnaire data indicated that teachers felt that the majority of students exhibit a broad spectrum of creative characteristics.

Regarding the possibility of developing creativity, the literature indicates that the teachers questioned believe that it is possible to facilitate creativity. In spite of the fact that data from Fryer and Collins' (1991) research disclosed that almost three quarters of the teachers thought creativity was rare, most (nearly ninety percent) of them thought it could be developed. As far as the facilitation of creativity, results indicated that teachers in the sample selected by Diakidoy and Phtiaka (2001) believed that facilitation of creativity in the classroom is possible. They also believed that teachers are capable of facilitating creativity in students and, as a result, they expected creativity to occur frequently in their classrooms in a variety of situations. The findings of this study could be viewed as being optimistic regarding the potential of schools to facilitate creativity.

The research of Cheung, Tse, and Tsang (2003) resulted in similar findings. Creative writing teachers of primary children responded that creativity can be developed. Regarding the first question in the study of primary and pre-service teachers Kampylis, Berki, and Saariluoma (2009), teachers disclosed their belief that creativity can be developed in everyone and that it is an integral factor in the progress of both individuals

and societies, thereby, confirming once again that teachers' perceptions of creativity include the belief that it is important.

More often than not, teachers involved in studies accepted responsibility for developing creativity in their students; however, some did not feel prepared to uphold that responsibility. The elementary teachers in the sample of Diakidy and Phtiaka's (2001) research considered creativity to be linked to both personality characteristics and cognitive skills and they believed the development of the characteristics and skills to be partially their responsibility. The results were considered positive. To the contrary, other teachers (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005) believed it is possible to develop creativity in the regular classroom; however, they did not believe it was their responsibility. As stated earlier, informants indicated that developing creativity was not the responsibility of the regular classroom teacher.   Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) then offered possible explanations for this outcome, which they described as being less than favorable. They thought that teachers' interpretations of the questions on the questionnaire might have been a factor influencing the outcome. For example, teachers were more positive in their responses to questions using the word "develop" instead of "taught." The researchers reasoned this was an indication that the teachers felt it easier to develop creativity where it already existed than to teach it where it does not exist. Another reason the regular classroom teacher might have shifted the responsibility of enhancing creativity lies in their definitions of creativity. When teachers associated creativity with art or gifted and talented they might have been less likely to see it as their responsibility. Similar to the responses in the study from Diakidy and Phtiaka (2001),

Greek in-service and pre-service teachers (Kampylis et al., 2009) believed that teachers' responsibilities included the facilitation of students' creativity. However, participants did not feel well equipped to uphold that responsibility considering their lack of understanding of creativity theories and types of creativity. They found these inconsistencies to be obstacles to the teachers' efforts to grow students' creative potential.

Regarding where creativity is manifested in schools, the literature shows that teachers believe that creativity differs from subject to subject. The teachers in one study (Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2001) believed that creative outcomes are not necessarily appropriate to learning in school and that creativity is most often manifested in the context of artistic and literary endeavors. These beliefs might have resulted in the use of instructional practices with limited potential to elicit and promote creativity. In another study (Kampylis et al., 2009), the majority of participants believed their students could express their creativity in a variety of ways across domains; however, they also believed that school subjects do not offer equal opportunities for creativity. Subjects such as art and music give students more opportunities to collaborate and to express themselves creatively than did less abstract subjects like citizenship, geography, and history. Overall, they found that the way in which the curriculum is organized and presented within the time constraints of a school day offered more or less opportunities for students' and teachers' creativity to be fostered.

Two studies (Craft, 1998; Craft et al., 2007) targeting teacher stance on creativity provided additional insights into teachers' perceptions. The major themes that came out

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of the first (Craft, 1998) study included the importance of the relationships and interaction among all constituencies (i.e., students, colleagues, and parents) involved in fostering creativity. Next, the nourishment of the self-confidence and self-esteem of learners and educators was seen as integral to creativity. Personal autonomy and artistry as an educator, or the opportunity to be oneself was another theme. Risk taking was also an outcome connected to creativity. Another theme was the belief that creativity involves openness to a wide range of influences. Participants also shared the tendency to value characteristics of creative teaching that they wanted to have. Lastly, the teachers believed in the nourishing nature of taking time for personal development. The time spent on personal development was seen as integral for the educator to be creative. Teacher stance was the focus of the second study (Craft et al., 2007), a qualitative approach on how progression in creative learning can be conceptualized. Progression is the developmental change over time in terms of what children know, understand, and can do. The research involved eight teachers who taught music and writing and students aged four to fifteen in four British schools. Areas within which teachers' stances were investigated were: learner engagement, creativity and creative learning, and, teaching for creative learning. Findings regarding learner engagement were that teacher stance shifted from a strong child-centered perspective in the earlier years of school, to a much more adult-centric one in the later years. Apparently, external constraints gradually eroded or reduced learner agency. Teachers of younger students appeared to expect and value creative learning as part of the formative role of a student's development. For older students, the pressures of curriculum and assessment decreased their opportunities

for agency. Teachers across all age groups emphasized the balance between structure and freedom in their stance towards teaching for creative learning. Early on, structure was related to exploratory and discovery approaches intended to encourage exploration. Increasingly, structure became related to subject specific knowledge and skills with the teaching taking dominant control of the structure. Overall, as children grew older, teachers' values reflected less emphasis on exploring and knowing and more emphasis on the curriculum framework and the external assessment.

Barriers to Creativity

Amabile's (1998) statement, "creativity gets killed much more often than it gets supported" (p. 77) reflects the magnitude of the barriers standing in the way of creativity. As she goes on to explain, in spite of the fact that most people value creativity, it is unintentionally undermined every day for a variety of reasons. When examining the obstacles to creativity in education, teacher beliefs are a key consideration. As an example, Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) concluded that teachers might feel inadequate when dealing with creativity because they had difficulty defining it, recognizing it, and appreciating it. An illustration is the paradox that exists between teachers' responses that they enjoyed teaching creative students while research (Dawson et al., 1999) indicated that they disliked characteristics like nonconformity that are traditionally associated with creativity. Further evidence of this obstacle was the study by Kampylis, Berki, and Saariluoma (2009) that found that when teachers responded to questions regarding how well prepared they felt they were to play an instrumental role in developing students' creative potential, respondents believed that

they were not prepared considering their lack of understanding of creativity theories and types of creativity.

Teachers' beliefs that they were not well prepared in the area of creativity highlights several inadequacies in teacher preparation that act as obstacles. Fryer and Collins (1991) recommended that to promote creativity development among educators, training programs and workshops should be tailored to address the differing perceptions and attitudes about creativity that exist. Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) also called for training to address teachers' potential feelings of inadequacy related to defining, recognizing, and appreciating creativity in the regular classroom. Kampylis, Berki, and Saariluoma (2009) recommended that creativity be a basic component of the teaching profession. To target needs identified in their study, Kampylis, Berki, and Saariluoma (2009) recommended courses for pre-service and in-service teachers that specifically focus on reflective, caring and critical thinking designed to foster creative thinking. As a follow-up, Kampylis et al. suggested future longitudinal studies examining potential changes in teachers' thinking about creativity over time. The implications of their findings such as their recommendations for teacher training and future research aligns with their belief that creativity is a general function of education integrating knowledge and skills from different subjects. Teacher training was also supported by Cheung, Tse, and Tsang (2003). One point examined in their study was teaching practices. It was apparent that teachers valued creativity and they seemed to be familiar with methods for enhancing creativity; however, the majority reported using traditional methods for teaching writing. It was found that teachers who were well

versed in creative teaching strategies were more willing to implement them in with their students. That finding supported the recommendation for creative writing training. In addition to creativity courses for pre-service teachers, the research indicated potential in-service training for teachers on a variety of topics in order to overcome the barrier created by gaps in teacher preparation (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Cheung et al., 2003; Fryer & Collings, 1991; Kampylis et al., 2009).

Another barrier to creativity became apparent when studies asked who is responsible for developing student's creativity. Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) found that teachers believed it is possible to develop creativity in the regular classroom and that the majority of students exhibit a broad spectrum of creative characteristics. Teachers also reported that creativity is essential to support students' academic achievement and that teachers should be knowledgeable about creativity; however, they did not believe it was their responsibility. To the contrary, in the study by Kampylis et al. (2009) respondents believed that teachers' responsibilities included the facilitation of students' creativity but as previously discussed, participants did not feel well equipped to uphold that responsibility considering their lack of knowledge about creativity. Therefore, the literature indicated that teachers are divided regarding whether or not they are responsible for developing their students' creative potential.

Teacher can impair students' creativity in ways other than simply failing to take responsibility for cultivating creativity; teachers can also impair the development of creativity by relying too heavily on curriculum frameworks. Studies (Craft, 1998; Craft et al., 2007) on teachers' stance toward creativity found additional barriers related to

teacher beliefs. The responses of the teachers in the first study (Craft, 1998) appeared to be from a position of belief in creativity as something positive. They were less concerned with practical issues such as curriculum, resources, and they were committed to risk. Both men and women in the study expressed a strong orientation toward the care ethic. However, some of them explained feelings of marginality in their creative approach to educating. In the second study by Craft et al., (2007), teachers' beliefs or stances toward creativity and creative teaching and learning were studied. Barriers to creativity were evident in the three areas of teacher stance studied: teachers' stance toward learner engagement; creativity and creative learning; and, teaching for creative learning. Findings regarding learner engagement were that teacher stance shifted from a strong child-centered perspective in the earlier years of school, to a much more adult-centric one in the later years. Apparently, external constraints gradually eroded or reduced learner agency. Regarding stance toward creativity and creative learning, teachers at all levels were found to value understanding each student as an individual, increasing the child's artistic voice over time, and improving the learner's ability to evaluate; however, teachers of younger students appeared to expect and value creative learning as part of the formative role of the student's development. For older students, the pressures of curriculum and assessment decreased their opportunities for agency. Teachers across all age groups emphasized the balance between structure and freedom in their stance towards teaching for creative learning. Early on, structure was related to exploratory and discovery approaches intended to encourage exploration. Increasingly, structure became related to subject specific knowledge and skills with the teaching

taking dominant control of the structure. Overall, as children grew older, teachers' values reflected less emphasis on exploring and knowing, and more emphasis on the curriculum framework and the external assessment.

In addition to the barriers presented by strict curricular frameworks, results regarding the compatibility of creativity and student achievement have also showed barriers to creativity. Examining elementary teachers' beliefs regarding aspects and outcomes of creativity as they are directly related to educational practices was the purpose of the study conducted by Diakidoy and Phtiaka (2001). In spite of the positive findings, other results defined obstacles. Teachers considered creativity to be unrelated to school achievement. This perception that creativity was separate from and, at times, incompatible with learning in the context of school might have been explained by the teachers' beliefs that novel strategies leading to incorrect solutions were signs of creativity. It follows that if correct solutions and answers indicate that learning has taken place then creativity may indeed not be compatible with school. The teachers in this study believed that creative outcomes were not necessarily appropriate and that creativity was most often manifested in the context of artistic and literary endeavors, and that prior knowledge was not a significant factor. These beliefs, coupled with the curriculum, might have resulted in the use of instructional practices with limited potential to elicit and promote creativity.

Since some see student achievement and creativity as being at odds, it should come as no surprise that constraints like curricula, school schedules, and resources also stifle creativity. As previously stated, there were optimistic findings in a study (Diakidoy

& Phtiaka) but obstacles were indicated as well. Many teachers responded that manifestation of creativity was not allowed in school due to the nationally-mandated curriculum. The nature of the curricula was seen to be inflexible both in its scope and sequence and the methods of instruction. Those sampled felt their own creativity was hampered by the curricula and, in turn, so was their students' creativity. Teachers in another study (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005) reported that they are too overwhelmed "with the demands of teaching content driven curricula toward high stakes testing" (p.32). In the British study conducted by Craft et al. (2007) teacher stance towards creativity and creative learning indicated that teachers of younger students appeared to expect and value creative learning while for older students, apparently, external constraints like the pressures of curriculum and assessment gradually decreased their opportunities for exploratory and discovery approaches to learning. Teachers across all age groups emphasized the balance between structure and freedom in their stance towards teaching for creative learning. Structure early on was intended to encourage student exploration then increasingly, the teacher took dominant control of the structure and it was redirected from exploration to subject specific knowledge and skills. Overall, as children grew older, teachers' values reflected less emphasis on exploring and knowing and more emphasis on the nationally-mandated curriculum framework and the external assessment. Kampylis et al. (2009) examined the conceptions of creativity held by in-service teachers and pre-service teachers in Greece. Findings indicated subjects such as art and music gave students more opportunities to collaborate and to express themselves creatively than did less abstract subjects like citizenship, geography, and

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history. Overall, they found that the way in which the curriculum is organized and presented within the time constraints of a school day offered more or less opportunities for students' and teachers' creativity to be fostered. Participants' responses indicated that they did not believe there to be enough opportunities and means for the expression and development of the creative potential of students. Bramwell, Reilly, Lilly, Kronish & Chennabathni (2011) reported teachers' creativity was also shaped within the limitations established by curricula, school schedules, and resources. Time was a significant resource dictating pacing of the curriculum and choice of instructional practices. Other resources mentioned as obstacles were a lack of appropriate textbooks, hands-on activities, and; again, the time necessary for the expression of students' creativity is limited (Kampylis et al., 2009). Research findings show that external constraints can hinder opportunities for creativity (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Bramwell et al., 2011; Craft et al., 2007; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2001; Kampylis et al., 2009). However, there are teachers who meet those obstacles displaying everyday creativity on an ongoing basis combining curriculum, instruction, and resources in novel ways (Bramwell et al., 2011). Those teachers' actions run contrary to the statement, "When creativity is under the gun, it usually ends up getting killed" (Amabile, Hadley, & Kramer, 2002, p. 52).

Stimulants of Creativity

In spite of the obstacles to creativity, there is evidence that there are ways in which it can be stimulated. The literature shows environment to be an important variable in fostering creativity (Fleith, 2000). Amabile (1998) presented a philosophical basis for

a creative teaching environment where learning is important and fun; students feel worthy, respected and loved; students have a sense of pride and ownership and are actively involved in the learning process; teachers are engaged as advisers or coaches; and, students feel open to discuss problems. The teachers' definition of creativity in the Fleith (2000) investigation included process, person, and environment. Teachers and students were in agreement regarding the importance of a classroom environment that allowed students choices, focused on students' interests and strengths, accepted different ideas, and boosted self-confidence. Regarding the environment, participants reported that three components contributed to the development of creativity. The components were: teachers' attitudes, strategies, and activities. The experts' responses in the study were similar when they described a classroom environment that enhanced creativity in three ways: teacher attitudes, teaching strategies, and the classroom climate. In a study (Cheung et al.), the importance of environment was also discussed. It was recommended that, for optimal benefit, teachers themselves must work in an environment that supported creative teaching and learning strategies. In 2011 (Bramwell et al.) indicated that the creative process was reliant upon an environment allowing synergistic interaction between the teachers' personal characteristics and the communities. Collaboration and compromises resulted in creativity that was recognized and fostered. Teachers' creativity was also shaped within the environment created by educational parameters such as curricula, resources, and school schedules. Teachers and administrators worked together within the parameters. The supportive environment established by administrators and other educators in the community was reported to

make being creative easier and less risky for teachers. The majority of the experts described the ideal environment as a safe one in which teacher attitudes were found to be an integral component (Fleith, 2000).

In Fleith's (2000) study, teachers' perceptions about classroom characteristics that enhanced students' creativity focused on their own attitudes. Teachers' attitudes mentioned were allowing students choices, accepting students as they were, boosting their self-confidence, and not imposing things on students. Regarding teachers' attitudes, the experts explained the importance of teachers who focused on students' strengths, interests, and abilities, and encouraged questioning, risk-taking, humor, and who provided their students with options. Another study (Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2001) also found that teachers' attitudes focused on encouraging independence in both thought and action, novelty, and self-expression existed. The teachers enrolled in the Craft (1998) study were committed to risk taking and less concerned with practical matters such as curriculum and resources and their attitudes were described as caring.

Along with the environment (Amabile, 1998; Bramwell et al., 2011; Cheung et al., 2003), Fryer and Collins' (1991) findings identified a creative teacher as a way of fostering the development of creativity. In order to foster creativity in teachers, research (Craft, 1998; Fleith, 2000; Kampylis et al., 2009) indicates the value of encouraging teachers to teach creatively through training, motivation, and rewarding practices that encourage creativity (Brinkman, 2010). Although teachers in the Fleith (2000) study were aware of the characteristics that fostered creativity, it appeared that the transference to practice was intuitive. Due to the apparent lack of procedural knowledge, a formal

creativity training program was recommended for teachers. The program including instructional planning, discussions, and follow-up observations would be designed to guide and systematize teachers' efforts and knowledge related to creativity in the classroom. Teacher needs identified by Kampylis, Berki, and Saariluoma (2009) included a lack of understanding of creativity theories and types of creativity. To target teacher needs related to creativity, they recommended courses for pre-service and in-service teachers that specifically focused on reflective, caring, and critical thinking designed to foster creative thinking. As a result of their study of primary school educators in Greece, Kampylis, Berki, and Saariluoma (2009) recommended that creativity be a basic component of the teaching profession. They highlighted the need for future cross-cultural studies due to the importance of creativity as it relates to the growth of innovation and human development. They also recommended additional research comparing the teachers of specialized subjects like music; the role of textbooks and curricula; and, longitudinal studies examining potential changes in teachers' thinking about creativity over time. The implications of their findings and their recommendations for future research aligns with their belief that creativity is a general function of education integrating knowledge and skills from different subjects. Several implications regarding fostering educator creativity resulted from Craft's (1998) study. First, the value of understanding the nature of relationships from the viewpoint of the learner, the connection an educator has with oneself, and the interaction of all constituencies involved in the process. Next, the importance of teachers as reflective practitioners who adapt plans and practice when appropriate was explained as being a

core element in being both a creative teacher and fostering creativity in students. Another implication was to encourage teachers to look for opportunities to be creative and to take risks. The final implication was to give educators space to use their professional judgment and to work in concert with colleagues in order to build trust. To summarize the factors that could be related to motivating and rewarding teachers, Craft's (1998) research included the importance of relationships, self-esteem, being oneself, risk taking, openness, personal development, and personal autonomy. The value of fostering creativity in teachers is apparent according to Brinkman (2010), since teaching creatively creates an environment that not only attracts the attention of students but it also keeps teachers interested in their teaching.

In the Fleith (2000) investigation that discussed the components that contributed to the development of creativity, teachers, students, and experts listed strategies and activities among the components. The strategies allowed students choices, and focused on students' interests and strengths thereby contributing to the positive classroom climate. Strategies included cooperative and cluster groups, free time, flexible directions, brainstorming, and an arts center. Hands-on and open-ended activities, creative writing, and drawing were activities listed as fostering student creativity. Teaching strategies that promoted creativity, as reported by the experts, were student-centered and varied.

Amabile (1998) suggested similar student-centered strategies in which students were active participants; teachers acted as coaches and advisers; and, cooperative methods were used over competitive ones. Tan's (2001) study of 95 beginning teachers

and 116 experienced teachers at the elementary level in Singaporean schools focused on learning activities for fostering creativity. An interview was used in this qualitative study. The first of two questions in the protocol examined teachers' perceptions of learning activities for fostering creativity and the second was designed to find out if teachers' perceptions of learning activities useful for fostering creativity differed across groups of teachers (e.g., years of experience or gender). The perceptions shared by beginning and experienced teachers in the study were that activities that fostered creativity were student-directed in which the students have the responsibility of organizing the activities. The learning activities fostered independent learning, demanded collaboration, and tended to motivate students. Differences did exist in the responses of teachers according to their years of experience. Beginning teachers seemed more receptive to student-centered educational initiatives and the majority of experienced teachers considered all learning activities as useful in promoting creativity. Results of the study emphasized the importance of recognizing teacher and student perceptions of learning activities and socio-cultural supports among stakeholders in order to achieve an open learning environment. Regarding activities and strategies that foster creativity quite simply, Amabile (1998) suggested a learning environment where the strategies used make learning important, relevant, and fun.

The Creative Teacher

"Good teaching is creative teaching, yet there is little research focusing on creative teachers themselves" (Bramwell et al., 2011, p. 228). A creative classroom teacher frequently conjures up images of eccentricity. Whether they are depicted in

movies or live through our own educational experiences, there are those moments that remain in our memories (Ritchhart, 2004). However, creative teachers most often display everyday creativity and they do this on a daily basis by overcoming both their students' challenges and their own. Creative teachers meet those obstacles by combining curriculum and instruction in novel ways. In spite of the daily need for creativity on the part of successful teachers, little research exists on them (Bramwell et al., 2011) and the research on teacher effectiveness in creative teaching is limited (Esquivel, 1995) as well.

In an effort to enhance the research on creative teachers, Bramwell et al. (2011) undertook a synthesis of 13 qualitative case studies and two quantitative studies of teachers who demonstrated everyday creativity. The research team used the constant comparative method to develop emerging categories and themes from the qualitative studies. The four themes identified were "personal characteristics, community, process, and outcomes" (Bramwell et al., 2011, p. 228). The two most prevalent themes were personal characteristics and community. Teachers' motivations and values related to creativity were captured by the personal characteristics theme. The way in which teachers' creativity is connected to their personal and professional communities fell under the community theme. The remaining outcomes and processes themes were important but less pervasive than the first two themes. Process included the ways in which the creative teachers combined their personal characteristics and their communities to address issues related to their practice. The creative teachers' products were referred to in the outcome theme. The interaction of the themes also proved to be

important. The personal characteristics of the teacher interacted with the communities and affected the creative process. The creative process then resulted in differing outcomes. The outcomes were then found to correspond with the values of the teacher and the communities.

As noted, the Bramwell et al. (2011) research team found the theme of personal characteristics to be a central one in the teachers' creativity. The personal characteristics theme was further divided into the categories of personal intelligences, motivation, and values. The teachers had high levels of personal intelligence and were knowledgeable about their own personal intelligence and that of others, including their students, their colleagues, and their administrators. The teachers also knew how to use their understanding of personal intelligences as it related to both the learning of their students and their own learning. Teachers who were passionate, persistent, and intrinsically motivated to make a difference in the lives of their students characterized the motivation category. Finally, the personal characteristics included a core set of values that were at the foundation of the teachers' decision making. The most common values were learning, professional development, and strong interpersonal relationships including those with the community.

They also valued the wellbeing of individuals, personal development, and intellectual activities such as thinking and learning. Outside of the categories of personal intelligences, motivation, and values, other personal characteristics were identified. Among the other personal characteristics were knowledgeable, hard working,

confident, energetic, and flexible. The personal characteristics of the creative teachers were intertwined with the communities of which they were a part.

The observation was made (Bramwell et al., 2011) that creativity resulted when the personal characteristics of the teacher and the community worked together. The community theme was further divided into teachers "*in community*" (p. 232) and teachers "*building community*" (p. 232) with the former being how the community affected the teachers and the later being how the teachers affect the community. Teachers *in community* (p. 232) included the classroom where teachers' creativity formed around the needs, interests, and abilities of their students.

Under the outcomes theme the teachers' outcomes were found to fall into four categories, "(a) observable products, (b) learning/personal development, (c) motivation, and (d) connection (interpersonal relationships and community" (pp. 233-4). Outcomes included a wide variety of observable products, learning on both the part of the teachers and their students, and, strong interpersonal and community connections. Another outcome reported by the creative teachers was an increase of student and teacher motivation; however, the research team cautioned that this point was lacking independent documentation.

As stated earlier, the research team (Bramwell et al., 2011) found the themes of personal characteristics, community, process, and outcomes to be significant, but the interaction between them was important as well. For example, the data indicated that the creative process was reliant upon a synergistic interaction between the teachers' personal characteristics and the communities. Collaboration and compromises resulted in

creativity that was recognized and fostered. The discussion in the study included the point that the ability of the participants to combine their personal characteristics especially intrinsic motivation and values, with the demands of their communities was at the heart of their creativity. Many and varied outcomes resulted from this process. Results differed somewhat from descriptions of eminent creators. The study extended understanding of the relationship between the individual and the community in the case of everyday creators. Important implications of the study were that in order to be most successful, creative teachers should use their personal intelligences to choose projects that align with both their values and the needs and interests of their students. It was further stated while the ideas from this synthesis may appear to be obvious, they are significant because they are inconsistent with current top-down educational reforms. However, in spite of these and other barriers to creativity, there are creative teachers who accept the challenge to confront those obstacles and combine curriculum and instruction in novel ways on a daily basis (Bramwell et al., 2011).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to seek an in-depth understanding of urban teachers as creative people. In order to address that purpose, the literature reviewed in this chapter began with a historical examination of creativity in U.S. education in general. Then, an overview of the urban educational landscape was offered to understand creativity in that context. Next, teacher perceptions of creativity were discussed to present the literature related their views about creativity and its development in students. Since some of the findings in the research on teacher perceptions related to the barriers

and stimulants of creativity, the literature on those topics preceded the examination of

the research on the creative teacher that concluded the chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this study, six teachers who had experience teaching in the same urban district were selected from elementary, middle, and high schools in an effort to expand the range of experiences. Participants were assigned pseudonyms. Each individual was questioned based on an interview protocol. The substance of this research lies in the data. This qualitative study used the actual words of the participants to tell the story, thus providing a rich illustration of the ideas presented. Narrative as defined by Sarbin (1986) is

> a way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions; it is an achievement that brings together mundane facts and fantastic creations; time and place are incorporated. The narrative allows for the inclusion of actors' reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of happening. (p. 9)

Background

School districts exist today in an environment characterized by demands related to accountability systems. Data from high stakes testing frequently drives district's decision making from the allocation of resources to instructional practices. Schools and districts in urban areas are often under even greater scrutiny because of student performance on state-mandated assessments and drastic measures are often taken in an effort to improve the data. As a result of these pressures, decisions that are reached often include increasing control over curricula and instruction.

The District

The selected district served almost 37,000 pre-kindergarten through twelfth-grade students located in an urban area 20 miles north of Houston, Texas. The district has experienced significant demographic changes in the past two decades. The district has earned a Met Standard accountability rating based on student achievement, student progress, closing performance gaps, and postsecondary readiness. Based on the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Report 2013-14 District Profile data, this selected district served a student population of 42.7% Hispanic, 39.9% African American, 11.2% White, 3.7% Asian, 1.3% two or more races, 1.1% American Indian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 74.2% economically disadvantaged. In comparison with the state, the district had a significantly higher percentage of African American students and a lower percentage of Hispanic students. The economically disadvantaged rate for the district (74.2%) was higher than the state (60.2%). The total staff of over 4,700 was 59.7% minority, higher than the state percentage of 45.7%. The teachers, broken by ethnicity and gender were 48.2% White, 31.8% African American, 17.4% Hispanic, 1.7% American Indian, 1.7% Asian, 0.4% two or more races, 0.1% Pacific Islanders; and, 77.2% female, 22.8% male. The district's percentage of 31.8% African American teachers was higher than the 9.6% African American teachers in the state. Teachers' degree was 2.5% no degree, 70.8% Bachelors, 25.7% Masters, and 0.9% Doctorate. The comparison of district and state data for teaching degrees showed similarities. By years of experience, the teachers in the district had 11.2% 0-1 years (beginning teachers), 28.6% 1-5 years, 27.6% 6-10 years, 23.1% 11-20 years, and 9.4% over 20 years.

According to this data, teachers in the district had less experience (9.1 years average) than teachers in the state (11.2 years average), and the average years experience with the district was 5.6 years. The turnover rate for teachers in the district was higher than the state at 23.2% as compared to 16.2%.

At the time of data collection, the district had 38 schools: five high schools, seven middle schools, and 26 elementary schools. The high schools were four comprehensive high schools and an early college academy. One of the high schools was a high-school career academy where courses were aligned with students' career interests until the 2015-16 school year. The seven middle schools serve grades six through eight. A middle school of choice focusing on math, science, and fine arts transitioned back to a traditional school during the 2015-2016 school year, as did the high-school career academy. The district's 26 elementary schools included one primary school (grades pre-kindergarten through second grade), one intermediate school (third grade through fifth grade), and 24 pre-kindergarten through fifth grade schools. One of the district's elementary schools opened in 2011 focused on discovery learning; however, like the high school career academy and the middle school of choice, it returned to the traditional curriculum during the 2015-2016 school year as well.

The district had a student-centered plan aimed at transforming the district by 2020. The district's vision centered on academics of high quality with specialized and innovative programs that created a positive learning environment and met the needs of all students (District Vision Statement). Its mission was to prepare students for the global society by encouraging them to become lifelong learners, to think critically, and

to display good character and good citizenship. The guiding principles of the district were high-quality teaching, literacy, meeting the needs of all students, building a safe environment and partnerships with parents and the community, and focusing all resources on student learning and accountability (District Website).

The Community

Geographically, the district was a figure eight shape bisected by an interstate highway and a major thoroughfare where most businesses in the district were located. Businesses had typically been the size of car dealerships or smaller until recently as major oil companies were building new facilities that spilled over into the district boundaries. The community was, however, primarily residential consisting of a wide span of home priced from multi-million dollar single family dwellings in one subdivision to homes that are federally subsidized. The vast majority of homes were either moderately priced single-family residences or apartments. The primary mode of transportation in the area was the automobile but more travelers were relying on city buses. Increasing cultural diversity was evidenced by the diversity of languages spoken and business changes.

Purposeful Sample

Rather than a random sample, the participants chosen in this sample represented a purposeful sample. The reason that purposeful sampling was selected was because it attempted to include participants who have experienced the phenomenon under consideration and from those whom the researcher can learn the most (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) wrote:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for in depth study. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (p. 169)

Moreover, without interaction, purposeful sampling and emergent design are impossible to achieve (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For this study, I interviewed six social studies teachers with urban elementary, middle, and/or high school experience within the same school district. The breakdown consisted of five female teachers and one male teacher. Two of the participants had only elementary school experience; two of the participants had both elementary school and middle school experience; and, two of the participants had only high school experience in public education. One of the high school teachers had experience teaching at a preschool, referred to as a mothers' day out, that her children attended. All participants were assigned pseudonyms. For the sake of this study, the term urban school district was defined as a district in proximity to an urbanized area (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). These teachers had experience within this school district which, according to the Texas Education Agency, has earned a Met Standard accountability rating based on: student achievement, student progress, closing performance gaps, and postsecondary readiness.

The purpose of selecting the participants from different levels of schools within the same district was to discover if any trends would develop from the information obtained. The criteria for the selection of participants was as follows:

- Male and female teachers;

- Having two or more years of teaching experience; and,

- Experience teaching social studies in the selected district.

Positionality

A qualitative study relies heavily on a human, the researcher, as the primary instrument. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained it as follows:

Naturalistic inquiry is always carried out – logically enough – in a natural setting. Such a contextual inquiry demands a human instrument, one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as, if not more than, upon propositional knowledge and uses methods that are appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and the like. (p. 187)

In this study, I was the primary instrument. Even so the interview served as the prime source of direct information received from the participants' perceptions on the construct of creativity and how they encourage creativity in their urban students. Some questions on the interview protocol stemmed from a review of literature while other questions were developed from my own experiences and curiosities that provided information relating to the purpose of the study.

I used an interview guide approach to naturalistic interviews beginning with a list of topics to be addressed by each participant, while allowing other points to surface. When gathering data, I asked the interview questions in an open-ended fashion in order

to minimize the occurrence of predetermined responses. The interview guide in this study consisted of two main headings: 1) personal, and 2) creativity. Although the questions were developed before the interviews, I allowed myself to word questions in a way that maintained a conversational style interview. For example, a conversational style interview permitted me to develop new questions while allowing the interview to flow. There was an opportunity for follow-up interviews as needed for further elaboration, explanation, or information verification; however, upon reviewing the interview transcripts none were necessary. Therefore, I used semi-structured interviews to search out explicit information that resulted from an outgrowth of previous interviews or specific information that provided comparable data across participants.

In this qualitative descriptive study, the interviews were conducted with the participants to seek an understanding of their self-perceptions regarding creativity in their urban classrooms. Since I am now retired the interviews were held in my home office, which was a quiet location for conversation. My home was also selected because of its convenient location allowing participants to travel a short distance from work or home. I interviewed each participant with most of the interviews ranging from 45-60 minutes. I scheduled the interviews ahead of time in order to prevent the possibility of schedule conflicts, postponements, or cancellation. Immediately following each interview, I organized notes from the interview. Organizing and reviewing the notes was done as soon as possible in order to allow me to recall other things that were not noted at the time they occurred. Audio recorded interviews involved rough-draft transcripts that I edited and then typed in final form.

Each interview conducted included handwritten field notes as well as was recorded on audiotape and digital recorders with the interviewee's consent. Handwritten notes involved my paying careful attention to what was said, and allowed me to make notations without making it known to the participant. In addition, taking notes did not require me to memorize comments made during the interview; however it allowed me to note important points for later review. On the other hand, using a digital audio recorder had many advantages, such as assuring accuracy and completeness, providing the opportunity to review as often as necessary, and assuring that full understanding would be achieved. Audio recording my interviews provided me with an opportunity to later review nonverbal cues such as pauses and voice pitches, as well as material for reliability checks. Transcriptions were verified by myself and compared with the audio recorded version. My participants received a copy of all transcripts for additional verification and revision.

The data collected for this study consisted of six narrative sets of individual lived experiences. The open-ended nature of questions allowed for individual participants to focus on what information about their experiences they felt was most pertinent to their perceptions about creativity. This was reflected in the narrative sets of each of the participants.

Data Collection

Among the different data collection techniques, interviews can be considered the best way to get the information that is wanted (Merriam, 1998). In this study, data such as recorded field notes, non-verbal cues, and participant observations were used to

obtain information through nonlinguistic signs.

My field notes consisted of a written account of observations, conversations, experiences, and descriptions of the participants and the events that directly or indirectly affected the way in which they defined creativity and encouraged creativity with their urban students. Observations as defined by Marshall and Rossmann (2014) "are the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p. 79), and can range in form from unstructured to very focused. The observations did not involve observing the participants teaching but being aware of the behaviors and events during the interview. Observation data were analyzed upon completion of each interview. In advance of the interviews, participants were given time to review and sign a consent form and participants were assured that all personal information (name, etc.) would remain confidential.

Research Design

This research study operated from a descriptive study method with social studies teachers in an urban school district. I adopted this qualitative research framework (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to gain an understanding of how these urban social studies teachers define and encourage creativity. The intent of this descriptive study was to broaden the limited research base relating to the lived stories and experiences of the teacher from those whose voices can inform others about pertinent issues of creativity in urban schools. In order to develop a clearer understanding of the teachers' perceptions on creativity as it relates to student creativity, this study investigated constructed meanings of the relationship between their definitions of creativity and the way they

encourage creativity in their students in an urban district.

For this study, I utilized qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth look at the personal and professional characteristics, perceptions on creativity, and approaches to encouraging creativity in the teachers' urban students. Research states that because qualitative methods come easier to the human as instrument, qualitative methods are emphasized within the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By this, it is meant that the human as instrument leans more toward methods that are extensions of normal human behaviors, such as listening, observing, speaking, and reading.

Qualitative research is based on an interpretivist epistemology, where the social reality is seen as a group of meanings that are constructed by the individuals who participate in that reality. Therefore, the major purpose of this study was to ascertain the nature of those meanings. I conducted the interviews with as little interruption of the natural setting as possible. Interpretation and meaning were the focus of this research. Merriam (1998) explained the characteristics of qualitative research to include an overarching interest in understanding the meaning people have constructed, and an inductive approach to knowledge generation. In this study, I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and my end product is narrative and descriptive.

In their own words, my participants described their perception of the construct of creativity and how they encourage creativity in their urban students. Developing an understanding of how these principles contribute to their success was dependent on strategies employed by qualitative methods, specifically interviewing. Interviewing allowed the interviewees to tell their own stories.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994):

Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's lived experience, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, process, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them. (p. 10)

Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (2014) asserted that it is not possible to understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which participants interpret their thoughts, behavior, and emotions. This study was grounded in the assumption that features of the social environment are constructed as interpretations by individuals and that these interpretations tend to be situational and temporary. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that qualitative research is multi-purpose in its focus, and involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Furthermore, qualitative methods enabled me to understand, from the perspective of the participants, the process, meaning and complexity of their situations. The importance of context, setting, and each participant's own frame of reference was emphasized as they allowed the emergence of constructs, which contributed to theory generation (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Finally, I attempted to value subjective, personal meaning and definition, commonalities, and individual voices.

Data analysis in a naturalistic inquiry, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is open-ended and inductive. Hence, data analysis begins during the data collection process and continues after the collection process is complete. Data in this study were

obtained from interviews, field notes, and observations. Following the interviews, I transcribed the notes verbatim, and rechecked them for accuracy. The thematic analysis of the data occurred after each interview. Unitizing, coding, and then categorizing ideas developed conclusions or statements of experiences from the data to ensure that the important constructs, themes, and patterns emerged.

Working within the interpretive theory, and since I was the primary researcher and primary instrument for both collection and analysis of data, I was able to share the world of the researcher and interpret what I experienced there. I immediately attempted to begin making sense of the data along with the interpretation of the phenomenon that I was studying.

I employed the method of unitizing data that will be considered as units of information supporting the defining categories. Categorizing, with the help of color-coding was used to layout categories that were connected or of the same content.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), categorizing is accomplished most effectively when it is defined in such a way that the categories "are internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible" (p. 349).

Consequently as a researcher, I had to break down, examine, and compare the categorized data. I began by using the individual narrative sets to desegregate data into broad topics, while I examined categories for overlap. The first category was the participant's personal, educational, and employment background. The discussion of creativity was the second category, along with the impact the teachers have had on their students' creativity. Themes then emerged from these categories.

Complementary Data Gathering Techniques

Other strategies and techniques such as digital audio recordings, field notes, and non-verbal cues were employed to gather additional data. The purpose of these techniques was to complement the collection and interpretation of the data.

Audio recordings. A tape recorder and a digital audio recorder were used to record participant interviews. The researcher reviewed and corrected the transcriptions.

Field notes. The main reason I recorded my field notes was to create a written account of the dialogue, observations, descriptions, and experiences of the participants and the events that affected them either directly or indirectly. My field notes also served the purpose of recording thoughts and feelings about the investigation, and a way of keeping record of any follow-up interview sessions that might have needed to be scheduled with the participants. Field notes were transcribed after each interview.

Non-verbal cues. Some non-verbal techniques that I included in the field notes were: body movements, spatial relationships, use of time such as pausing, pacing, and probing, volume, voice quality, voice inflections, and touching (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I asked additional questions during the interviews so that I could better understand each participant's non-verbal cues.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Establishing trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry is a critical process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to build trustworthiness and credibility in this study, I used an audit trail that reflected triangulation of the data through the use of interviews, observations, and recorded field notes. This procedure helped me maintain the data in an

understandable and retrievable form. I assured each participant's privacy, confidentiality, and inclusiveness in an effort to meet ethical standards. In addition, I encouraged my participants to engage in member checks to review, clarify, and revise, if necessary, constructions developed by myself.

Member Checking

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the most crucial strategy for establishing credibility is member checking. Member checking is a process that involves participants verifying data and the interpretations collected during the interviews. The benefits of member checking can be formal or informal. It can help to provide participants with the opportunity to evaluate overall quality, share additional information, and to correct interpretations or errors. Member checking consisted of study participants receiving a copy of the interview transcripts for review, clarification, and recommendations.

Transferability

Transferability has been endorsed as the qualitative equivalent for external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore they stated, "If there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator rather than with the person seeking to make the application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do" (p. 298). With that understanding, as the primary researcher I only described a specific situation and its particular meaning for the participants in this study, then the reader may relate the findings to their own experiences.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is the naturalist's substitute for reliability. It can be demonstrated by "taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change" (p. 289). In order to establish dependability, it was necessary to examine the records for accuracy and to validate documents. Confirmabilty was employed during the data collection and analysis phases to construct and verify findings that may be important to increase what little is known about creativity in urban schools. I maintained a record of the inquiry process, copies of the recorded interviews, field notes, and hard copies of all transcriptions to demonstrate confirmability.

Summary

Qualitative methods have been chosen for my research because of its nature, setting, and personal interest. I followed procedures and took steps necessary to provide an in-depth look at urban teachers' perceptions of creativity. I employed interpretive lenses to investigate the constructed meanings of the relationship between lived experiences and the way the teachers defined creativity and encouraged creativity in their urban students. I want to underscore the naturalistic inquiry that helped me to investigate the lived stories and experiences of urban teachers. It is from the voices of these social studies teachers that others can be enlightened about issues of creativity in urban schools.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to seek an in-depth understanding of six urban teachers as creative people. The research focused on the relationship between their personal creative characteristics and creativity in the classroom. The following research questions served as a foundation for the study: (1) How do the selected urban teachers define creativity? (2) How do they encourage creativity in their students?

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section is an overview of the participants and how they were selected. The second section is a profile of each participant; six social studies teachers with experience in an urban school district in Texas. The profiles include details of their teaching experience such as: the number of years; the grade level (elementary or secondary); the courses they have taught; any unique teaching assignments they've had; teaching experiences in different types (rural, suburban. or urban) of communities; each participant's perception regarding teaching in an urban setting; and the meaning of the pseudonym they were assigned to protect their identity. The third section is a discussion of the major themes and subthemes arranged categorically and supported by the data from individual interviews and the overall responses to the research questions. The fourth and final section of this chapter presents a summary of the study's overall findings as they specifically relate to the major research questions.

The data in this chapter were collected using 12 interview questions that were semi-structured and open-ended in nature (see Appendix A). The individual interviews allowed the teachers to share their experiences related to creativity as social studies teachers in urban schools. In hopes of providing a rich representation of the ideas conveyed, the speaker's emphasis, and the unfolding social interaction between the researcher (designated as "R") and the participant (identified as "P") excerpts from the interviews were used to connect the participants' stories to the research questions (Linde, 1993).

Participant Overview

The six teachers who participated in this study all had experience teaching social studies in the same urban district in Texas. They were invited to be in the study because of their creativity. I became aware of their creativity when I had the opportunity to work with them either when I was a classroom teacher or when I was the Director of Social Studies or both. There were five female participants and one male. Their experience ranged from six to 31 years. Combined, they shared over 100 years of experience teaching in urban schools. Of the women, two had elementary (intermediate grades) experience only and one of them was a bilingual teacher; two had elementary (primary and intermediate grades) and middle school experience; and the last participant had only public school experience was at the high school level. Along with that experience, she also taught three-year-olds at the pre-school her children attended. The one male had experience at the high school level. They had a wide variety of experiences regarding courses they had taught. One elementary teacher taught social studies and language arts

but the three other participants with elementary experience taught the four core courses: math, science, and language arts, along with social studies. The two middle school teachers had taught several courses at that level but the primary focus had been history. Of the two high school teachers, one had taught world geography and history and the other had taught every course offered at the high school including Special Education co-teach settings and Advanced Placement. Two of the teachers chose to teach at the district's schools that used the inquiry based discovery learning technique; one was an elementary school and one was a middle school. They remained at those schools; however, the schools are no longer based on discovery learning. Both schools have returned to the traditional curricula and teaching approaches. The male teacher became a teacher after a career in business. Four of the six had held leadership positions. Three of the participants had experience in rural classrooms; one of which was in Central America and all six of the participants choose to teach in their current urban settings.

Participant Profiles

This section presents an overview profile of the participants; its purpose is to provide information on their personal and professional backgrounds for the reader to get to know and understand them. This is important, as it will help in getting to the main purpose of this study, which was to seek an in-depth understanding of these six urban teachers as creative people. The research focused on the relationship between their creative characteristics and creativity in the classroom. These participants were each assigned a pseudonym by which they are referred to throughout their individual profiles and the rest of the chapter. The profiles of the participants (pseudonyms): *Faith-the-*

Flexible, *Helen-the-Hardworking*, *Karen-the-Knowledgeable*, *Miriam-the-Motivated*, *Paige-the-Passionate*, and *Paul-the-Persistent* are presented here in alphabetical order with no specific significance to that order.

Faith-the-Flexible. Faith has been teaching elementary school for 13 years. Of those years, all of them have been at the intermediate level: two years teaching third grade; and 11 years teaching fifth grade. Along with social studies, she has taught language arts. Her experience also includes teaching at a school where the curriculum and the new school facility were designed around discovery learning. Faith started teaching there when the school opened and it was a discovery-based school for the first three years. Employees hired when the school opened had little to no experience with the discovery approach; however, Faith, her colleagues, and the administrative team received regular training in writing curriculum and implementing the approach in the classroom. At the beginning of the fourth year that the school was open, the district was undergoing considerable changes. Challenges in the district resulted in new leadership at the top and the decision was made to return Faith's school to the traditional curricula. The change was made once the school year was in progress. Faith and her students, with experience with the discovery approach, were disappointed with the decision because they had come to value the learning environment and the outcomes. For Faith and teachers like her working for the district, they are now given scripted daily lesson plans they are expected to follow that align with the district's scope and sequences.

Faith has teaching experience in two types of communities: rural and urban. The first three years that she taught were spent in the small (population of approximately

8,000) Texas town, where she was raised. Faith described those first three years of her

career in this way:

> P: Very rural. (R: Very rural.) Very small. One elementary school. One middle school. One high school. Um…Our classrooms were about…you know…the average: 20-25 kids but very small, small town. Three A district. I…I think you had personal relationships with your students because they're all right there in a small (R: Sure.) town with you. You see 'em at the grocery store. You see 'em at Wal Mart. You see 'em everywhere.

She then moved to the urban district where she presently teaches. When asked to

explain her perceptions of teaching in an urban school, Faith described it like this:

> P: My perception…um…(Pause)…To me, it's rewarding. Um…I feel like a lot of the kids want…they want to be at school because it's a safe place for them and you're that safety net. And just seeing them learn and…and excel is very rewarding and very fulfilling as a…as a person even, and just the relationships that you can build with them because you may be all they have. (R: Um-hum)

> R: Is there anything that you would like to add or go back to? Either about your personal information or about creativity or instruction? The urban setting?

> P: Um…Not that I can think of. I'll probably think of something when you turn the microphone off. I just think that…you know…they always kind of…when you think of an urban school, they kinda label those kids as different and they can't learn and they can't do this…that a non-urban school would. And it's not like that…you know…*they're kids* and, yeah, they may not have as many experiences and they may need a little extra push here and there (R: Um-hum) but they all learn the same (R: Um-hum). They just learn the same but they learn different…you know…and it's like…they just need that little extra support. And when it comes to creativity, just that little extra twist on (R: Um-hum) whatever you may be teaching them.

Faith went on to explain what she would want people to know about her students

in order to correct any possible misconceptions.

> P: They're just kids. And they want to learn just as much as anybody else does; if not more. Um…a lot of our urban kids…you know…don't have the opportunity to go to college and a lot of 'em do drop out of school and things like that. And they probably want an education *more…deep down inside* (R: Um-hum)…they want it more than….than other students do. (R: Um-hum)

R: Do you feel like you…as a teacher…your relationship is the same…um…in an urban setting as when you were in rural…or different?

P: It's different. (R: How's it different?) Um…and I don't know if it's different for them but it's different for me. Um…I guess…rural, I saw, "Ok. They have that home support, they don't need me." But with the kids that I teach now… I'm like…they need *me*…you know. They don't…a lot of them don't have anybody when they get home. And they need me to be there every single day. They need structure in the classroom. They…they *need* that. And they *want* it. And they need it. (R: Um-hum) They've got to have it. (R: Um-hum) Cause they don't have it at home.

For the purpose of this study, Faith was assigned the pseudonym of *Faith-the-Flexible* because she had exhibited a tremendous amount of flexibility during her 13 years in the classroom. Starting her career in a small, rural community then moving to a new job near a big city shows her strength and willingness to take risks as well. Then, in her current district, her flexibility was shown once again when she took a position at a new school that was about to open based on the discovery approach to learning – something she knew little about but was willing to learn. When asked if the transition was an easy one for teachers new to the process, this was Faith's response:

P: I think for some it was but for some it was not. It's one of those where, you have to want to change cause it's very different from traditional teaching of standing up in front of a classroom and lecturing. And, I think for some teachers that was very difficult to let go of those reins of control and give it to your students. And a lot of people struggled with that. Our first year we had a huge turnover cause it wasn't for everybody (R: Uh-hum) you know…and…but some people love it…you know…letting the kids be in charge of their own learning just guiding them in the direction they need to go (R: Uh-hum, uh-hum). Some people love it and some people…it's not for them.

When asked about her preference between a traditional classroom and a discovery-learning classroom, Faith explained:

P: (Sigh) To me…watching the kids work on their own is like…it's *fun*…and it's… seeing them…I've, I've always…I've always had the…uh…the opinion of…like our kids that already know something and I'm standing up in front of a room and I'm teaching it to 'em anyway. And I'm thinking...they already know this. Why am I teaching this to them? I feel like I was…you know…kind of wasting their time in a way. And so I feel like with discovery approach learning, those kids that already have a grasp on certain skills…I don't need to teach it to 'em again. And they can go and research a topic…you know…whatever topic they're being given. They can go and research that and take it as far as they want to take it. And those kids that still aren't grasping something, then that gives me the opportunity to pull them in a small group (R: Um-hum) and really do that...one…almost one on one teaching (R: Um-hum) with them (R: Um-hum).

Along with monitoring her students' learning through observing them while they

worked, she also valued their input into what went on in the classroom.

R: Let me ask you this. Do you gage your instruction, your creativity at all based upon what you perceive or your students literally tell you that they are enjoying and benefitting from? (P: Yes.)
How do you do that?

P: Um… You know, just listening to 'em during activities, "Oh, this is fun. I like doing this!" Or, "Are we gonna do what we did yesterday?" You know or, "Can we do this again?" So you kinda have to listen to them of what they like and you can hear 'em sometimes moan and groan if they don't like something or they don't enjoy something. And you can't always give *everything* they want. (R: Sure.) But…um…definitely…listen…I listen to them and if they enjoy something then maybe we can do the same thing with a different topic. (R: Um-hum) You know…just because…if they enjoy it, I know they're learning. (R: Sure.)

Faith's observations of her students along with their input caused her to believe

that the strategies that help them to learn best were the creative ones.

P: I would have to go back to discovery approach learning. Um…You know, I feel like when we did that our students were such well…so *well spoken*. They could get up in front of strangers that they didn't know...any time…or, not any time…at the end of a project…um…they would…they had to present their information. And so they were constantly whether it was presenting in front of their classmates; presenting in front of the different grade level classrooms. We would invite visitors in to view their work. They could speak in front of anybody. And that was a skill they can take on throughout life…you

know…being able to speak in front of people. And that was *huge* with our kids. And a lot of our visitors that would come in, that's one of the compliments, "Your kids are so well spoken." (R: Yes.)

Faith could be described as a caring, professional, and intelligent teacher who exhibits a great amount of commitment to her profession, her school, but above all, to her students. Now, in spite of her preference for facilitating discovery learning and her belief that, "that you should teach the way *your* kids need to learn," she has called upon her flexible nature once again in order to follow the district's directive because she understands that her students need her.

Helen-the-Hardworking. Helen was a veteran teacher who has been in education for 31 years. She had just announced her plan to retire from teaching at the end of this school year. Her teaching experience included 13 years of elementary experience and 18 years of secondary experience. Her elementary teaching included both the primary and intermediate grades. The 18 years of experience she had at the secondary level had been in middle schools. All 31 years were spent in the same district where she herself attended school. Along with her experience as a social studies teacher, Helen had taught all other subjects: math, science, and language arts when she was an elementary teacher. One year she taught a unique combination of sixth grade science and social studies. In her career, Helen had varied teaching experiences, which included an assignment at a middle school of choice. When the district announced plans to open a middle school targeting the fine arts, Helen, excited about the challenge, expressed an interest and she was chosen to join the staff. Like the new, innovative elementary school in the district, the middle school of choice was a discovery learning school. Also,

similar to the elementary school, the staff was about to embark upon a professional challenge for which they had little knowledge or preparation. But, the district supported the staff throughout the years that the school was focused on discovery learning until it, too, was changed back to the traditional curricula.

As previously mentioned, Helen had experience teaching in one community; the one in which she grew up and lived in or near her entire life. Historically, the district had experienced significant changes during her lifetime. When she was growing up, there were large areas of rural land in the community that gradually were overtaken by population growth and it transitioned into a suburban community. As the nearby city expanded, the area and the school district became urban in nature. All of Helen's years of teaching were spent in this district so the majority of her career had been urban experience. Helen described her time in the district in this way:

> R: Ok. All right. Have you experienced a district as it's transformed from being an urban district to an…I'm sorry…from…a suburban district to an urban district?
>
> P: Uh…yes, I have. Um…in my 30 years experience in the school district…um…it has changed over time. The population has changed over time. The ethnicity has changed over time. The growth of the school district by number of student population has more than doubled in my years in education.

The follow-up question related to her perception about the urban setting.

> R: Ok. What is your perception about teaching in an urban setting?
>
> P: I don't believe that I had a real perception of it. Um…I believe that the children, no matter whether they are in an urban, suburban, or rural…um…setting, would need the same kind of teacher; the same kind of person who would bring creativity...would bring…um…activities that bring history to life…that bring any lesson that they have to life where there's understanding. Um…Students who have not had the opportunity to go outside of

their area need the world brought to them so they can understand the world…um…as it is and they need as many experiences as possible.

Helen's beliefs about bringing learning to life earned her the pseudonym of

Helen-the Hardworking. This was illustrated in one of Helen's responses.

R: Does creativity look different, as the district has changed?

P: Um…I believe that…it really has. I don't know if that has to do with the way…uh…technology has changed things or the life the children live. You do have to spend more time creating lessons that…uh…keep the children involved…that…uh… keep their attention. No longer are you able to stand and deliver a lesson. You have to make it hands-on where the children are actively engaged for them to grasp the concepts…um…for them to…um…be interested in what you are teaching or to retain the information….um…takes more effort as a teacher…that…it's ever changing and ever evolving from even period to period changing and having to be creative with your lessons to ensure that the students grasp the information.

Helen's belief that it takes more time and effort to actively engage students today

was evidenced in the creative use of her classroom space as a learning tool for her

middle school students.

P: Um…I use my walls. I use word walls. I create and have the students create different word wall activities…you know…with pictures and connections and creating those connections on the wall. And, many times I'll stand at the wall and talk from a poster or from a…uh picture that we've drawn. Um…and, so that the kids…and tell the kids, "When you get to taking the test, picture me standing here. Picture where this is on the wall." So that they have that opportunity to internalize where the information is when that time comes to need that recall.

Helen's description of the use of her instructional space detailed a strategy that

progressed throughout the entire school year helping students to build on their prior

learning.

P: Well, in my U.S. History class I had three color paper panels. The red, we put everything to represent British and we did all of the word wall and pictures of the colonies, the map of the colonies…everything went on the red construction

paper….a…butcher paper. Then, we had a white section of paper and everything when the colonists were…um…were trying to break away…and when they were trying to create their own identity…the difficulties and the dissent with England and that was all the neutral territory. And, when we went to the American Revolution, everything was blue. We were becoming an American and all the people that were involved; their pictures, the battles of the American Revolution. Everything to do with that time period was on the blue paper. Um…and it made a timeline. It started at colonization and it moved across the wall. The back wall was creating that government and all of the seven principles of government were there. Um…and, different kind of graphics to show the government and the Da…the Declaration of Independence…um…were there, again. And that timeline and then timeline had the presidents and what happened in each president's presidency around their photo.

The activity incorporating a variety of skills and techniques such as: sequencing, visuals, graphics often included samples of student work. This proved to increase student interest in learning in Helen's classroom.

P: And…uh…a huge map blank…it starts out blank at the beginning of the year in the room and…um…we draw…I draw…on white butcher paper and as we talk about the colonies, we label them on the map. As we…uh…do the French and Indian War, it's added. And, the mountains and…um…as America expands...ha…expands, the map expands throughout the year. Uh…and the kids draw it in their notebook. We draw all of the…uh…economic processes from fishing and shipbuilding in New England to cotton and tobacco and indigo in the south. We draw them on the map. And, the presidents are over that area as it expands and…um…on through Lincoln. So, the whole room is a huge timeline with all the word walls and the events and things that happened throughout that area. Um…and, so that the kids can understand and they know that daily they know where to go back and look for information if they have forgotten it, they know where it is on the walls.

All of Helen's responses were measured and thoughtful and they painted her as a strong, calm, and dedicated teacher. Career choices that she had made and assignments she had been given indicate that she is a very flexible person and a problem solver who is always looking for new challenges and one who is willing to put in the effort needed to be successful. The fact that she had spent her entire career in the district in which she

grew up indicated tremendous dedication. That dedication was also indicated by her willingness to go beyond expectations both in the classroom with her students and outside of the classroom supporting other teachers both professionally and personally. She held a number of leadership positions including acting as an instructional coach for other teachers and, at the time of data collection, she was the Department Chair of the department at the middle school at which she taught. She had multiple opportunities to represent her district out of state at conferences and had also traveled with students as their sponsor both within the United States and to countries in Europe and Asia. As she indicated her belief in one of her responses, "Students who have not had the opportunity to go outside of their area need the world brought to them so they can understand the world…and they need as many experiences as possible." Through Helen's hard work she had made those experiences possible for her students for 31 years.

Karen-the-Knowledgeable. Karen retired last year after 31 years as an educator. She taught all grades from kindergarten through eighth grade: 23 years as an elementary teacher and eight as a secondary (middle school) teacher. Her years of experience can be broken down further into: two years in a parochial district; three years in a nearby urban district; and, 26 years in the urban district from which she retired. As an elementary teacher, she was a self-contained teacher at times teaching her students all of the four core subjects.

Karen's work experience in an urban settings consisted of 29 years in two different districts. When asked about her perceptions of teaching in an urban school district, she responded with valuable insights:

P: Currently my perception about teaching in an urban setting is that because it's an urban setting and because there are pressures on teachers for certain requirements and certain scores, that…um…the teaching tends to become a more ritualistic and…um…organized and step-by-step. And…and it's to benefit…it's to standardize things. And the standardization loses a lot of our students.

R: Ok. So talk to me a little bit…more detail about…uh…the pressures of teaching in an urban district, the ritualization…ritual…ritualistic instruction and the standardization. What it is that's missing?

P: What's missing is, the teacher's input and the teacher's gut feeling about how kids learn best. Teachers in the classroom…the teacher actually has those kids and can actually…you know…if they're worth their salt, they actually see what different kids need and how they need to learn. But, yet they're being told you have to get from this point to this point by this time; therefore, you teach it straight up the line. There is no…there is no modification on what you're doing.

Karen's urban experience included teaching in a district as it transitioned from

a suburban setting with rural pockets to an urban one.

P: Yes. I would say so. The district that I was formerly in was in the process of that transformation. Um…when I first went to the district it was very much a…more like a rural district. And everybody knew everybody and it was…it was very much individual teaching styles and more personable and over time it became more machine like.

R: Ok. And when you…how many years ago was it that you started in that district? Is…is this the district that…that you were most recently in? (P: Correct. Correct. Correct.) And how many years ago was it that it was more rural?

P: I would say as recently as 15 years ago it was more rural.

R: Ok. But now much more suburban (R: Intended to say, urban.) (P: Much more suburban.) Ok. And what have those changes been like? Not necessarily just as far as instruction is concerned but what makes you say that it's more of an urban district now?

P: Um…I would say that it's more of an urban district because it tends to be run from the top down. Um…there tend[s] to be a person whose in charge of a person whose in charge of a person and it's more about systems and putting systems and procedures in place and somehow it's not translating down necessarily to the true learning of students. (R: Ok. Ok.) I think something gets lost in translation. (R: Alright.)

R: Um…And obviously you've had that experience of…in the district that's transitioned from suburban to urban. Has creativity looked different during that change?

P: Oh, absolutely! (R: How?) Um…when our district was more rural, creativity was the norm. It was encouraged. It was a more natural outcome of learning and teaching. And, over time as the district evolved into a more institutionalized process or strategic process, there was less and less opportunity for that creativity to enter into the learning. And, it might still be there and it…it was there sparking in different places but it was much more controlled and *much* less natural. And, therefore in, in my opinion students' learning was not as deep as it should have been. (R: Um-hum. Ok.)

Karen gave an example of the top down control and how it affected creativity among the teachers.

P: For top down control, I would have to say that teachers were discouraged from being creative. Um…lessons were more standardized. Everybody needed to be on the same page at the same time in order to cover the material, in order to get to the proper checkpoints for testing. Um…and, and there were teachers that would go out on limbs occasionally and do something a little bit different and if it worked and the scores were okay then everybody was fine and if it didn't then obviously the teacher would get blamed for that. But, it's just the whole process and procedure did not lend itself to creativity. It lent itself to more standardized (R: Yes.)…you know…one size fits all kind of teaching. (R: Ok.)

Karen came to be called *Karen-The-Knowledgeable* not only because of her tremendous knowledge but also because of her willingness to share it with others. She prided herself on collaborating with teachers on undertaking things like planning and preparing for state assessments. The value of her knowledge and contributions to the teachers with whom she worked was evidenced in her collaborative work with colleagues:

P: …she and I would work together on different plans and lessons and activities. And that strength and that collaboration among teachers works well and it works well with kids, too. So when we transferred to a new campus, it usually took us a

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year to kind of build the program up and get it going but every campus that I was at, while I was teaching American History, that particular campus had the highest scores in the district. (R: And, how many campuses?) I was on two different campuses. (R: In the same district?) In the same district. (R: And you had the same cohort built?) Same cohort. Same opportunity. Same results. Good results.

Karen also received feedback from former students that was further evidence of the impact of the collaboration that took place.

P: And, and…uh…my other true measure is the fact that in later years when I left campuses and went to the administration building, I often had an opportunity to walk the halls of high schools and I had (chuckles) many, many students say, "That was my American History teacher. I will never forget American History. That was the best teacher in the world. We did this. We did that." I had students tell me that they saved their notebook that they created for school. And so I, I'm hearing it enough to know that I must have been doing something right. (R: Ok.)

Karen left the classroom for a leadership position at the district administration building. In that position, she supported teachers, principals, and parents with technology.

P: When I left the classroom, I came into a position as an Instructional Technology Specialist. And it, it was at a time when our district started to embrace the idea of technology and the fact that students could do some of their learning with a computer and that there was a lot of good material and programs out there for students to be able to use and…you know... the district took a bold step forward and started buying Chromebooks which in my opinion are a wonderful device for a kid to start learning in. And…and so I was to help support that. So I would go into teachers' classrooms, show them lessons on a Chromebook they could use for their content area, show 'em how it would fit. Um…I would go into principals' meetings and talk to principals about some, some opportunities and some devices and some programs that we could use. I would go to…um…Back to School Nights and set up kiosks for parents to start getting parents informed about the fact that their kid had a Google account and all the Google apps that their kid could use to be creative with.

Over time, the external constraints such as standardized assessment outcomes caused the district to rethink the use of technology and the resources had to reallocated to less creative uses.

> P: Um…and so I did a variety of different things for the last couple of years and, and that worked well until the district started figuring out that they needed to do some remediation programs and one of the remediation programs was heavily involved in Chromebooks. And, so the Chromebooks then became a station for remediation pretty much one hundred percent of the day and not an opportunity for students to be creative.

In turn, Karen's position was also impacted by decisions the district made related to student performance on state mandated tests.

> P: Ultimately, my position became neither desired or required. And, I…I was moved from Instructional Technology to support Workforce Development. Workforce Development had the emphasis of training teachers and training teachers in practices that were standard across the board type practices and not necessarily instructional technology. Because this has to be some kind of training that every teacher could do on any campus at any time and some campuses obviously didn't support instructional technology or had, had no funds or not enough equipment. So anything outlying was not able to be taught.

In her Workforce Development position, Karen had the opportunity to do classroom observations throughout the district.

> P: Often…often times I would go in classrooms and watch lessons…um…In…initially, my charge was to look for instructional technology and then later on it became observing teachers, period. I also had the opportunity to…um…evaluate our district on House Bill 5. And House Bill 5 involved myself and another person having to go out and evaluate twenty percent of the teachers on every single campus in the district and document for different things. And so I had an opportunity to observe teachers that were using technology and teachers who were just straight teaching.

> R: Ok. Uh…Would you say that…Talk to me about the…the creativity that you observed. Were these…let me…let me restate that. Were these observations unannounced? (P: These observations were unannounced.) Ok. Were you uh…observing creative practices most of the time?

P: Um…Meaning was that what we were looking for? (R: No.) Or…was that what I was seeing? No. No. (R: You were not.) Really, it was very depressing to me as a teacher. (Chuckles) Um…not a lot of…not a lot of creativity going on. Not a lot of teaching going on. A lot of…you know…memorization type things going on. A lot of kids sitting in a row, yawning, copying, writing. Teacher up in the front, teaching. You know for the most part…I mean every once in a while we would come across a really active, engaged classroom. But for the most part it was pretty much 1950s teaching.

Karen was as a passionate, focused, and knowledgeable professional, who, for years was able to use that combination of personal characteristics to not only engage her own students, but also, to assist other teachers in uncovering their students' potential as well.

Miriam-the-Motivated. Miriam had been teaching for 18 years at the elementary level. During those years she had taught both primary and intermediate bilingual students; every grade except fifth grade. The majority of her experience had been the upper intermediate grades: third and fourth. Of her 18 years, 16 of those had been spent teaching social studies. As a bilingual teacher she had almost always been self-contained meaning that she teaches her students all subjects including math, science, language arts, and social studies. Leadership positions she held include a math coach, an instructional specialist, and she was called upon to support teachers in all subjects. On occasion, she had been asked to act as the assistant principal or principal in their absence.

Miriam's teaching experience included opportunities in two types communities: rural and urban. Her journey to become a teacher started in rural Guatemala where she is from. This was a four experience that she was eager to describe.

P: I just want to add that before I moved to the United States, I was teaching in my country, Guatemala was well. (R: Alright.) And, I had the opportunity to teach…uh…not only also in rural schools. And, I have the opportunity to compare and contrast both sides.

Miriam compared the two experiences in this way:

P: I can see what…the needs of every school. 'Cause in urban schools, the kids have more opportunities. They have more access. And, on the other hand…they…they are…lack materials. We have to walk several miles in order to get to this school. (R: I see.) That was how I can compare and contrast. (R: Right.)

R: So here in the United States, while some people may think urban schools are lacking things….

P: But that's not true. Rural schools…Some teachers have to…uh…walk past rivers in order to get to the school. And I was acting as a teacher and also as a supervisor because of the lack of teachers missing school because of lack of transportation.

That experience appears to be influential in the classroom teacher that she is today. She appeared to be grateful to have had the opportunity. Miriam's teaching career began in Guatemala and she received her degree in Texas. Since earning her certification, she also had extensive urban experience. She spent her 18 years of teaching in the United States in three urban school districts.

When asked about her perception of teaching in an urban school, Miriam explained:

P: My perception of teaching in an urban setting is the kids need to have everything they need in order to be successful.

Miriam saw her urban classroom as "their classroom," a "second home" for her students and she believed that honoring their voice in their home should be a priority.

P: And…I know…really…what the kids tell me really cares because they have the right to say it. They have voice in my classroom. And, I'm learning you

know…I'm learning and I say to the kids, "I'm the teacher but that doesn't mean I'm the expert because I'm learning from you as well." And, I'm flexible when the kids tell me, "Miss _____, I really want this." They have the right to tell me what they really want because it's their classroom. (R: Um-hum.) And, I don't have any behavior problems because they feel that I care about what they say.

Miriam went on to explain the importance of her student's voicing their opinions and the classroom environment she developed to encourage them to do so.

P: The student's voice, it's important to me. They know that. They know that. Because it's not just… "This is what the teacher told me to do and this is what I will follow." I really ask the kids what they really want because it…the school…the classroom is their second home and it's where the majority of the time…you know…that they are there. (R: Um-hum.) That really counts to me. (Chuckles.)

It was evident from her responses that Miriam was a caring teacher who was motivated to ensure that her students succeeded.

P: …I like challenges and I like to see how the kids grow and I like to see results.

This drive was seen in her response regarding her commitment to preparing her bilingual students for state assessments in spite of occasional gaps in their learning.

P: You know…I can see some…I receive kids…you know from other districts…(R: Ok.)…and I can see the lack of a…language…that can be a problem…

R: Absolutely. Um…I know that at the fourth grade, your children are tested at the state test. (P: Yes.) How do your children do on…? How do they perform?

P: My previous years…uh…based on those experiences…the majority of my kids were…like a…one hundred percent passing…uh…in writing, math, and reading…a Commended. When we…when we were teaching TAKS, it was Commended. But at this time with the new STAAR, we say Level…Level 3 is like Commended. Almost the majority of my years have been successful.

R: And, your students…uh…what language or languages are they being tested in?

P: In both. (R: In both.) If, if I see those kids aren't ready…you know…you make the transition in their second language, I push them. I don't really allow them to stop. And the ones that are not ready because they haven't mastered their first language or their mother tongue first, those are the kids that take the test in Spanish. (R: Ok.) Because we need to make sure that those gaps don't exist when they go to fifth grade.

Miriam never lacked motivation; therefore she came to be called *Miriam-the-Motivated*. Miriam's professionalism was evident in her eagerness to accept challenges. Whether it was digging into the learning gaps of her bilingual students or helping with her school's challenges, she saw them as opportunities rather than problems.

Paige-the-Passionate. Paige had six years of teaching experience at the time of data collection. Of those six years, all of them had been at the same urban high school. She taught for three years then took off 10 years to start her family. She had since returned and spent three years in the classroom. She had taught history and was assigned to U.S. History, which was a state tested grade level in the state of Texas. Along with her secondary teaching experience, she also volunteered for three years to teach three-year-olds at the mothers' day out preschool that her sons attended. She described it as being "a whole other world." The Department Chair, Paul who was also a participant in this study, relied upon Paige to lead review sessions for all students in preparing for the state assessment.

Outside of her opportunity to teach at a mothers' day out preschool as stated earlier, all six years of Paige's teaching experience had been at the same urban high

school. Her response illustrated her passion when she was asked about teaching in an

urban setting.

> P: (Pause) For me, I like it. I like teaching it because I feel like I can give students something that they most likely are not receiving in their lives. I do…I try really hard to treat each kid with dignity and respect and…you know…because I find that in doing so, that's what they give back to me. It's very much…what you put in is what you get out. So for me, I have no problem because I am unfailingly polite to them and…you know…for example, if they get loud or if they want to try to pick a fight with me, it's very helpful to be able to say, "I have never been anything but polite and kind to you. Why are you speaking to me this way?" (R: Um.) And usually they're…they have enough snap to say to themselves, "Hey, you know what? She's right. You never have been rude to me. Why am I doing…cause this is on me." (R: Um-hum.) And, a lot of times…you know… there's a lot of….uh…from the class, "Hey, why are you getting loud with her? She didn't say anything ugly to you. You need to figure out what's wrong with you. Don't put it on the teacher."

Paige found the way in which some urban teachers view their students to be

troubling.

> P: But, I do find a lot of people in the urban setting…(Sigh)…I almost want to say they view the kids as "throwaway kids." Maybe….you know…"Ok. I'm just here…." you know…like we were talking about…"for the paycheck." Or…you know… "Well, they're never gonna learn anything so I'm gonna lower my standards and then maybe they'll get a little something." You know…but then…of course, ...the testing comes in…so, it's like…"Oh, no! I've got to teach these to pass the test." So, I think people aren't as respectful of what's going on in the kids' lives as they need to be because there's a whole other…you know…12, 16…however many hours we don't see them….where we don't know….They could be the breadwinner. Or they could be helping be the breadwinner. They might not have lights that night. You know…they sure don't have…a lot of them don't have parents making them lunches the next day or caring about what they do. So, if…if I can be that one person in this urban school who shows them…hey, this is what an adult does…then, that's good. And, I find that a lot of people don't give the example that they need to…all the time. (R: Ok.) Nothing ever does (Unintelligible)…But, maybe if we all just changed one thing, then maybe it would be better.

She offered a possible explanation for why those teachers stay in their urban high

school.

P: Um…I'd say, laziness. And, plus if they say kids are throwaway kids they probably aren't…you know…able to get another job. And…you know…just like with any work environment…"Oh well, that's just how they are. Oh, that's just their way." And so, it's gone on so long that people don't want to rock the boat or change. And…you know… I can understand that, everybody fears change and we're all victims of…you know…routine. But, I don't think it's right. But, I think they stay because it's too hard to go out and find another job and while the paycheck might not be much, it is more than zero.

Paige wanted to serve as a role model to her students. She goes on to explain that this is another reason why she wanted to return to the urban high school at which she began her teaching career.

P: Well, selfishly, I'll go with the conceited part first. When I walk into a place and I'm dressed nicely or I walk into a classroom…I'm dressed nicely, I try to…you know…talk with a little bit more…you know…academic vocabulary and just try to present myself as someone who does not need to be there. I told the kids, "I am not here for a paycheck! I am here because this is where I want to be."   And when they see that and they really, truly feel that….you know…they…uh…they respond to that. So I like the fact that I can…you know…kind of be someone's role model. You know…I've had at least one student say, "You're so nice all the time, Miss. I want to be nice like you *all* the time." And then I laugh inside to myself…ha-ha-ha-ha-ha.

She then stated other things that she likes about being a teacher at an urban school.

P: But I also like being in an urban environment because I just like the kids. The kids are funny! And they say the craziest things and…you know…if I can save one kid from doing something bad or making a bad choice because I made the comment of, "Don't forget to make good choices!" Or, "That's not something I would necessarily think is a good idea." Then, you know…I've done something good. I maybe have changed the trajectory of their life even though it's just something simple like, "Hey, you know, the roads are wet. Ya'll be careful out there."

When Paige was asked if she noticed a difference in creativity at the high school where she teaches when she returned after 10 years away, she reflected on what she perceives to be a difference in teacher efforts.

> P: I don't think so. But, I know…one thing I can say for sure is the kids notice when you put creativity into things and they *really* respond to it because it's so different from what they're seeing. "Uh…Ooh! Look at this." Or, just…you know…my room is decorated nicely. "Miss, this must have taken you hours to do this." And I'm like, "Well, this is our home. This is where we spend a lot of time, so it has to look nice." So, I don't think the definition of creativity has changed. I think that less people are willing to put in the time to be creative. "Oh, well! We've had this worksheet for 20 years. It works. There is no need to change it."

Paige brought up the point that her students made requests for specific instructional strategies, such as a technology-based review game that they liked. When asked how she knows what students like, she responded:

> P: I flat out ask 'em. Usually, on days when…you know…the day before spring break…the day before Thanksgiving or Christmas…um…We always kind of do…back to that…we kind of do a preschool activity, really. Like the day before we leave for Thanksgiving, I have them all make turkey handprints…you know… (R: Chuckles) and they all have to make little turkeys and tell me five things they are thankful for. I *keep* them all! I put 'em in a little book so we can all…you know… "Remember when we did this, guys?" (Spoken in a voice like a proud teacher/parent.)

In order to improve instruction for the next school year, Paige solicited student input at the end of the year in this way:

> P:…before they leave at the end of the year…I give them…you know…like an exit interview. "What do I need to do next year? What did I do a good job of? What did I do a bad job of? What's one thing you're always going to remember that we did in here? What made you laugh?" You know, that kind of thing. (R: Ok.) And, sometimes they have really good ideas.

Paige was vivacious and described herself in great detail using terms such as: "chatty, too loud, fun." Humor came up more than once in the interview and she

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explained that there was always room for humor in her classroom because you had to know what you are talking about in order to be funny. When asked if she used humor with her students, Paige said:

> P: Absolutely. They think that I am the corniest joke-maker in the world. But I tell them the *cheesiest* jokes like the *worst* jokes you could find on the back of bubble gum wrappers. And some look at me like, "Oh, my. She is very dim." Or, they laugh and they're just like… "Oh!" I laugh every time cause I think they're hilarious! And they're like, "Oh, Miss! Oh, no! You need better jokes."

An illustration of Paige's humor is her use of singing in instruction. When asked about memorable moments in their class throughout the year, this is how her students responded.

> P: The number one thing that they like about my class that they say they will always remember is singing because I make up songs to go along with the stuff that we're supposed to be learning in order to help them remember. A lot of them are very call and response. And a lot of them are just…we're gonna sing this. And a lot of them say, "Please stop singing." But a lot of them are like, "Miss, do the song really quick before we take the test." And I can see them doing the hand motions as they are taking the test so I know that it works. Because how many song lyrics do you know the words to? Hundreds and hundreds (R: Sure.), right? So, if you sing it especially to a song they already know…(Pfffffff!). They'll remember it forever. And that's one thing that they all say, "I didn't like singing with you but it did help me remember this."

When the topic of her urban students' reading came up, Paige offered insight into her beliefs.

> P: There are students, who struggle, struggle to read basic words. Um…To the point where I don't want to embarrass anybody by asking them even to read aloud. Which…you know…so there's always few groups of students who, I'm like…Ok…I know that they can read this out loud…let's…they can read this. And I do try to…you know…mix it up a bit and get everybody out of their shell because we're all family. It's ok…you know…everybody makes mistakes. But, I've actually had a student this year who is 15 years old, "Miss, is there somebody at this school who can help me learn to read 'cuz I can read the words but I don't understand what they mean when they're all put together." So, you're telling me you've made it *to* high school, you are 15 and no one has bothered to

check if you have reading comprehension. That's not ok! That's *really* not ok! (R: Um-hum) Because…I mean…that's…that's a second grade skill.

It appeared that her student felt comfortable sharing his reading challenges with

her because of the way in which she related to him and her other students.

> P: I think that my urban student…the kids I have now, find me approachable. Because like I mentioned before, I am respectful to them. I am polite to them. I have a very clear set of standards that we adhere to. And, I think consistent. Like, I'm always the same. They know when they come to my room, these rules are happening. So, I think when things are…you know…shaky maybe…for them somewhere else, they can come to me and they know that…they can almost guess what I'm gonna say because of my consistency. But…I mean….I think…when you genuinely like somebody, they know it. (R: Um-hum) And, I'd say,   the   majority   of   my   students….   I   genuinely   like. Like…they're…they're…they're kids just trying to make their way just like everybody is.

The reason for Paige's pseudonym of *Paige-the-Passionate* is illustrated in many

of her responses but nowhere is it more evident than when she talked about the lack of

parent responses to her communications. Paige conveyed that she had one parent who

regularly engaged her via email regarding her son's performance in class. Her tapping of

her hands together stressed the importance she placed on all of her students' parents

monitoring their progress and being "invested in them."

> P: She is invested in what happens to him. (Tapping hand) And, I feel bad when I look at all the other kids and…I'm like…They're just as great as this kid. Who is invested in them? (R: Um-hum) I…and I think you know that I'm selfish and I wouldn't want a lot of parental involvement. I want more than I'm getting. (R: Um-hum) You know…just…it's….it's…it's so frustrating to put it all out there (R: Um-hum) and not get anything back. (R: Um-hum) You know… "Do you even know that your kid's taking U.S. History?"

Paige was indeed, according to her own words, "chatty and fun," but as she also

said, "caring." When she was asked to share anything she would like to share about

herself, her first identifier was as a mother. From that initial question in the interview,

her nurturing nature was evident through every passionate response that she gave about teaching in an urban environment.

Paul-the-Persistent. Paul had a total of 13 years of teaching experience. All of those years had been spent teaching social studies at the same urban high school with Paige. His teaching assignments at that school varied widely within social studies. He had taught every course including Special Education co-teach classes and Advanced Placement. He also held leadership positions including team leader and at the time of data collection was the Department Chair of the social studies department.

While Paul had only taught in an urban setting, his pre-service experiences were in the rural area where he grew up and where he and his family lived. He was asked to compare his urban experience to the rural experience he had.

> P: It was quite a total surprise 'cuz I did all my observations in…uh…more of a rural school district. (Chuckles) And, I saw kids come and go extremely well behaved but I didn't really see a lot of…really interaction between the teacher and the students because they just came in and did what they were told. And they pretty much taught the kids to follow along with whatever they said and…it…it just…uh…I know…didn't see the teacher and students being…I don't know…maybe as close as they are…to…in the urban settings because it didn't seem to matter. 'Cuz they would do…would do what you wanted no matter what and the…the teacher just kinda did what they wanted and everybody followed along. (R: Uh-huh) It seemed much more of a boring atmosphere that I observed. (Laughs) It seemed like an easier one…you know…that's the way a lot of people might look at it.

Paul provided additional information to explain why he found the atmosphere to be boring and easier from a teacher's perspective.

> P: It…it seemed to me…because some days when I…when I did my observations I thought…I remember halfway through the day…that it's…it seemed like…maybe, I thought it would be more exciting. (Laughs) (R: Uh-huh) And, I'd watch them just class after class and…I don't know…it just didn't seem like you had to…you didn't have to try real hard to get them to do whatever you

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wanted. And, a lot of them did just kinda routine stuff and I didn't…maybe see a lot of creativity to get the kids involved. Where now, I see us everyday discussing how are we gonna get 'em to do this and if you don't have something really good then the kids will eat you up. (P and R: Laugh.) So, you have to struggle hard. (Laughs) I don't know.

When asked, Paul went on to compare the difference in creativity in the rural school environment to creativity in the urban school setting.

P: There was very little student involvement in any class that I sat in. (R: Ok.) I didn't really see any student involvement, it was all teacher directed. They…uh…some got up…a lot talked from their desks. I saw the kids very compliant. (R: Ok.) But, I…didn't see 'em try to get the kids to participate in…I guess…activities. I saw lots of lecturing, lots of notes, worksheets (R: Um-hum) In the…urban, I see the exact opposite. We have to…you got to give them something to do to get 'em busy 'cuz if you don't get 'em…actually involved with it, then they're off task. So, we need more… game maybe… instead of a review…you can't just stand there and talk for the review. You've got to come up with some really good review game to get everybody to participate and to want to go along with you. And, but you have to get them to take a role in it. That…the rural area, they didn't really give them a role. They just kinda came in and did what they were told. (R: Ok.) And, (Chuckles) the teacher did all…all the work, basically.

Paul clearly preferred teaching his urban high school and offered an explanation of what it is like to teach in an urban setting.

P: That's, (Chuckles) nothing like what anybody expects…(Laughs)…it's…then I guess…you have…when people watch TV, they always have the idea of the urban schools and it's not like that either. (R: Ok.) It's…(Pause)...I…you have such uh…(Pause)…uh…just uh…broad mix of kids with so many different things going on in their lives each year that…and even day by day…(Hum)…You have to kind of pick their experiences and put the…make the real world connection into your class. It makes what you're doing seem important to them even though especially you get in there and school is not a priority to 'em. You gotta get 'em interested somehow. So, even if…maybe it's not a priority to 'em, if you can make 'em come in there and see that it still does matter, maybe they will follow you along.

Paul compared the urban setting from his vantage point to what may be seen on television and noted the differences.

P: I mean, on TV people…'cuz most people they always…the 13 years I been there, since I live in a total different …I guess…community… 'cuz, I live…(Laughs)…maybe more in a rural area and then when I tell 'em I work towards Houston, they…first thing…they, "How do you work with that type of…uh….kids down there?" And they have no clue. But, they've just seen TV and they, they just think it's very rough and very dangerous…and, it's just a tough environment to go to. And then, they always say, "You need…ya know…work in a safe environment. You need to get out of the city and, it's…it's not what they think. They see that on TV…all the movies they make they show all the violence and…uh…the crazy stuff in the schools that really doesn't exist. I guess it…and they don't really see kids that come to school and actually want to be at school…when most of the kids really do…. Even if it's not their priority, most of them do like coming to school.

In Paul's experience, he did not feel that the urban school setting is an unsafe one

and he explained why.

P: No, I've always…I've always felt safe and most people…wh... that have been there feel safe. Some people when they come in their first year…uh little…they're kinda uncomfortable and they're not sure what to think. And, then a little bit of time…the way the urban kids…immediately, the teacher becomes their teacher. Compared to outside, maybe if you worked in…uh…maybe more affluent community, they may…I guess…maybe look kinda down on you a little bit cuz they see you only as a teacher. Where here, they come to you and see you as their teacher over time…and…they really more stand up for you because you're their teacher and they be bad for you certain days but nobody else is gonna be that way for you because you're theirs. And…(Laughs) (R: Ahh)…which is hard to understand until you've actually have been in there (R: Ahh)…then after you've experienced that, especially for new people, you know, it takes them a few months then they realize how important it is for th…to the kids to be there even when they its a difficult place to be some days.

R: What exactly do you mean when you say the kids look at you as their teacher? What, what does that entail or what's that like?

P: It uh…it's almost like a family status the same of 'em see you. 'Cuz some of 'em…you maybe…maybe, maybe you probably spend more time with them than…maybe…a lot of their, their family does at home. 'Cuz you do see them every single day and then you give them the attention every day that a lot of them are lacking. So, they latch onto you quite, quite a bit. (Chuckles) (R: Uh-huh) And, you…when you deal with 'em sometime you feel like maybe they are arguing back with you or cooperating with you really well….maybe, almost like

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a parent/child instead of teacher/child. So, (R: Um-hum) you always have to keep that in mind that they see it different than, than what some other might see it as.

Paul's perseverance was why he earned the pseudonym, *Paul-the-Persistent* because he accepted every challenge in a positive way. Earlier, when he was describing the difference between instruction in the rural high school where he did his pre-service observations and the urban high school in which he teaches, he said:

> P: Where now, I see us everyday discussing how are we gonna get 'em to do this and if you don't have something really good then the kids will eat you up. (P and R: Laugh.) So, you have to struggle hard. (Laughs)

Later, he went on to explain his belief about his role when meeting the challenges of keeping his urban students engaged on a daily basis.

> P: I….I guess…I guess every year (Chuckles), I keep trying to come up with something new (Chuckles). 'Cuz I like to keep thinking to improve at the end of the year…even though I've never had a bad year but each year, I've tried to go up. And…uh…always gotta find a way to get them more into it every year and that's always a challenge. So, you think about maybe what you did last year but think maybe they would do it a little bit more if you could add something to it. And, always, the trick is…I guess…every year you gotta find something new to add. I feel like I'm almost working a show every year. And I'm the actor and I have to make it a little bit better. And, if not…maybe like the stand-up comic trying to keep the crowd involved. (Chuckles) (R: Uh-huh) So, they don't go to sleep on you.

Paul's demeanor was friendly, unassuming, and kind. He voice was soft-spoken and laden with an infectious rural Texas accent. He and his family still lived in the rural area where he was raised. When asked to share something about himself, he was very proud to tell the story of how he became a teacher in his forties. Teaching was his second career but his first choice. He always wanted to be a teacher. But after high school, he went to work for a multinational corporation starting at the bottom. Over 20 years, he worked in a number of positions including accounting and numerous management

positions when he decided to go back to college. He wanted to stick with the original plan for college that he had as an 18-year-old, so he began the traditional route of becoming a teacher at the university he originally planned to attend. However, a professor's retirement and scheduling concerns caused him to change to an alternative certification program in order to become a teacher. He exhibited great pride in achieving his goal of becoming a teacher.

Not only did Paul show great pride in becoming a teacher but he also strived to be a better one each and every day. One of the ways he tried to improve was by soliciting and acting upon student input. When asked if he openly divulged to his students when he made a bad move instructionally, Paul shared:

> R: And…I did tod...when my second class came in today I said, "I'm gonna try it a little bit different (R: Laughs) …cause it was a little bit boring." And they kinda looked at me and I said, "So, if you're not having fun, you better tell me at the end what else ya'll want to do with this because we gotta make this fun. 'Cuz, I was just bored for an hour." I was hoping there…and then a couple of 'em they threw out ideas. "Or, we can do it on the board together." And, they, they gave me some things. And I said, "What do you want to do with it?" And, I took into consideration all reasonable ones that…where we still stayed on task. (R: Absolutely) Anything that was just to get out of work, we didn't do.

But, Paul acknowledged that he considered his students' opinions and worked with them in order to make the learning relevant and engaging.

> P: They, they gave me some good ideas and they gave me some bad ideas, you know. (R: Sure. Of course.) "I just have a partner...(Unintelligble)…Let's just do that." You know…like…no, we shouldn't. We'll do our own stuff. But…you know. We went to tables instead of desks this year so I said, "You can have your table partner and ya'll can work together to do it but you have to do your own work but every table must participate with the board. And, we still worked it out.

The gentleman from rural Texas and his urban students did, indeed, work it out. Under Paul's direction, a classroom environment existed in which both the students and their teacher thrived.

Presentation of Findings: Interviews

This section outlined the major findings of the study in terms of the responses of the participants. Following the same pattern, excerpts of the interviews were used to give a full account of the patterns of dialogue that took place between the researcher and each participant. The responses were obtained from the semi-structured, open-ended interview items (see Appendix A) that permitted a conversational style interview. Questions in this interview guide were informed by the overall research questions (Briggs, 1986) and formulated according to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter I. Divided according to representative sections, or identified themes, each subsection includes a discussion of the theme and relevant segments of the interviews that are reflective of the identified themes.

The findings in response to the first research question, "How do the selected urban teachers define creativity?" revealed diverse definitions of creativity. The emergent theme that was a result of this question is *Freedom to Focus on the Student*.

Freedom to Focus on the Student. In response to the first interview question, "How do you define creativity?" of the teachers who participated in the study four of them gave brief definitions of creativity. All of the participants were encouraged to add to any of their responses, including the definition of creativity, later in the interview if they felt compelled to do so. The two remaining participants gave longer definitions that

included examples of their thinking. Karen, with 32 years in education, was the fastest

to respond and gave a very succinct definition.

> P: I define creativity as the ability of an individual to solve a problem…to learn and solve a problem in a manner that best suits them.

Helen who had 31 years of experience was also to the point when she stated,

> P: Um…I believe creativity is where you come up with activities…um…that bring and use imagination and reasoning skills…um…and…um…ways to…um…involve the students to help them learn better.

> Paul started to state his definition in a short statement that began with him

admitting that he might not have a definition.

> P: (Pause) I'm not sure if I have a definition but…I'd say, maybe what I'd be thinking was…it'd be the freedom to…teach your class in a way that…you think would engage your students without someone directing you.

Miriam's definition indicated that creativity actually originates with the student.

> P: Creativity is something that comes…something that comes from the student's mind. It's natural. You know…it's engaging. It's real. (R: Ok.) It's real world experience. (R: Alright.) Hands on. I'm sorry. (R: Hands on.) It's also hands on.

Faith also focused on the students' needs in her definition.

> P: Me, personally, I think creativity is kind of based on…especially in the classroom…based on your students and what they need in order to learn. Um…I've always been one of even…we've always been departmentalized so, we rotate classes…switch classes during the day…and each class is different. So you may be teaching the same material but you've got to present it differently because one group of kids learns a different way. And so I always feel like creativity is based on your students' needs.

> After a few moments thought and when asked about his use of the word freedom,

Paul began to think of examples he wanted to add to his earlier definition.

> R: Ok. So, that freedom is important to you?

P: I think, it's probably one of the most important things 'cuz every class is different as you see each group of kids all day long is different. So, you know what you have to do to get them involved and if you just do one particular routine method, it doesn't fit 'em all. (Chuckles) And, if every class is doing the same thing across the board, then it seems like you're getting further away from what we need to be doing.

R: Ok. So, you mentioned that one strategy or one…one activity doesn't fit them all. How would you modify…uh… your teaching to try and meet the needs of all of your students? How do you do that?

P: I mean a good example today…I thought I had a good idea (Chuckles) last week and as soon as I did it the first time, I realized I had to come up with something different. And, as the day went on, I just kept kinda adjusting it. By the end of the day, I thought it went really well. But, the whole idea…thought it was too boring the first class so I tried to get 'em a little bit more excited then we switched it up and I just kind of added more student involvement and then at the end of the day I even rearranged the room a little bit better. But, I had…was changing it every period and I kept thinking who was coming out…would fit them the best.

R: So, you were judging based on your students' reactions.

P: On their reactions. And, the first class, I thought…it….they didn't seem into it.

R: Ok.

P: Which I didn't like then because it just seemed like they were getting bored with it. So, then by the next class I put the part in where I got them up out of their seats and put 'em up at the board…and, then I kept adding to it.

R: Ok. (Pause) As I said, if you…if there's anything you'd like to add…I will ask you that later on.

Paige started to define creativity as the way, "most people would" define it, and

then she put it in more colorful terms.

P: I guess most people would say thinking outside the box or thinking of a different way to do the same old thing. I just see it as…um…I don't know different colors and different ways to put it…you know…something surprising that makes you stop and look at it….you know…maybe just a different way to frame the answer…put some glitter on it. (R: Um-hum) But, creativity…you're

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not thinking in a straight line…you're not trying to get from point A to point B. You're trying to make that journey look nice, or be interesting. (R: Ok.)

The responses to the first research question, "How do the selected urban teachers define creativity?" did initially, reveal insights into the different ways in which an individual can define creativity.   Regardless of the varied definitions, there were commonalities and the theme: *Freedom to Focus on the Student* emerged. Repeatedly, the participants mentioned: the individual; involving the students; engaging the students; the student's mind; the student's needs or the needs of a group of students; and, according to Paul, what "would fit them the best." I think Paul expressed it most emphatically when he said that freedom in the classroom is probably, "one of the most important things" when it comes to creativity.

Importance of Teacher Attitude. The findings in response to the second research question, "How do they encourage creativity in their students?" revealed insights into the teachers' thinking that connected their attitudes to their students' creativity.   The three major themes that emerged from this question include: (1) *Importance of Teacher Attitude,* with three subthemes: (a) *Authenticity*; (b) *Genuinely Cares about Students*; (c) *Genuinely Cares about Teaching*; and, (d) *Genuinely Values Creativity*; (2) *Environment,* with the subthemes: (a) *Safe*; (b) *Flexible*; and (c) *Engaging*; and, the final major theme (3) *Strategies*.

Authenticity. To begin with, regarding the theme *Importance of Teacher Attitude* as it related to encouraging creativity in their students, participants' comments showed how genuine they were with their students. Some of their responses aligned with the

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subtheme of (a) Authenticity. For example, when it comes to being genuine, Paige

spoke in very specific terms regarding her students' perceptions about her authenticity:

> R: Do your students…do you think that they think you enjoy what you do?
>
> P: Yes. Yes. 'Cuz I tell them everyday. There's been many times where I've told them, "I do not need to be here." (R: Um-hum) "I *don't need* the money that I get from here. You know. I could be at home. I want to be here. I choose to be here with you (tapping to emphasize words) at this school because I like you and I like U.S. History." And it's so blatantly obvious. (R: Um-hum)…I'm here because I wanna be here. This is where I choose to be. I *like* you! I like this school. And…you know…you say it often enough and they believe you. And, for the most part I do like them. And…it's, it's, it's…it's I guess…just people: *real sees real!* That's what they say, "Miss, yeah…she's real."

Paul explained his use of an "I Am" poem at the beginning of the year that not

only allowed him to get to know his students but it was also designed to be a vehicle by

which he could introduce himself as a person, as their teacher, and his intent to help

them learn. The end result was a strategy that gave students insight into the genuine

person that Paul was and his genuine goodwill toward them.

> P: So, on the very first day if they think you're genuine and you'll tell 'em…I tell 'em everything about myself basically…And…I tell them why I'm teaching…where the idea came from and why I'm still there…And…um…what I want to…you know do for them…and what I want…you know…to see out of them…and a… expectations…and…usually, they write really good stuff. That's where my best…the best thing I have for getting to know them right now.

When discussing the value she placed on student input, Miriam showed the open

and honest way in which she communicated with her students when she said, "I'm the

teacher but that doesn't mean I'm the expert because I'm learning from you as well."

The topic of humor came up more than once with Paige. She is quick to use it to

show her students her authentic self.

R: It appears that humor is important to you. (P: Yes.) And, do you use your humor with your kids? Is there room for their humor?

P: Absolutely. They think that I am the corniest jokemaker in the world. Yes. Always room for their humor cause you have to know what you're talking about to be funny.

The importance of teacher attitude was evident in these responses. They valued authenticity and they showed it when they were genuine with their students. As Paige's students said, "Miss, yeah…she's real."

Genuinely Cares about Students. Still under the theme: (1) *Importance of Teacher Attitude* some of their responses aligned with the subtheme of: (b) *Genuinely Cares about Students*. The participants had a variety of ways to let their students know that they cared about them. For example, from the first day of school, Paul showed them that he was willing to listen and wanted to get to know them through his use of the "I Am" poem strategy. Not only was this an introductory way for Paul to get to know his students but as he mentioned in his response, he regularly referred back to his students' poems throughout the year in order to help him figure out what was going on in their lives. Paul mentioned that he starts by listening.

> P: You, listen…and somebody brought up something pretty simple that probably most people…I…I don't know…we seem…a lot of us use it now…It could have been something you shared with me. I'm not sure where I even picked it up. (Chuckles) Somebody told me to do an "I Am" poem a few years ago. (R: Um-hum) And then I asked a couple…the first year it worked but it didn't work like it does now. So, when I did it the first time…about halfway through the day the kids were like, "You didn't do that with us." So, now every year the very first day of school before we get started, I have to tell 'em who I am and I have that I wrote for 'em. And, I go through it line by line really showing them how to write one. But I try to explain my lines to what each of them means. So, it takes about 15-20 minutes but when I'm done, they know pretty much…'bout everything there is to know about me. And then I tell 'em…that uh…, you know that I give 'em a little speech about that the only way that I'll know them is if they tell me

stuff. And…uh…anything that they would want me to know, I want them to tell me. And, the more I know about 'em, the more I can help 'em. And over probably five or six years now, I've gotten…I always keep 'em every year. And every now and then, I will go back probably four or five times a year, I will read through 'em. What if there's a kid that stuff doesn't make sense, I'll go back and I'll reread that poem to see if they tell me something I'm missing there and a lot of times, I get a lot of information like that.

Paige had found that her students who were juniors in high school enjoyed a pre-school strategy from time to time then, she, like George, kept their work. When explaining the book of student work that she kept, her voice was that of a proud parent.

P: Usually, on days when…you know…the day before spring break…the day before Thanksgiving or Christmas…um…We always kind of do…back to that…we kind of do a preschool activity, really. Like the day before we leave for Thanksgiving, I have them all do turkey handprints…you know… (R: Chuckles) and they all have to make little turkeys and tell me five things they are thankful for. I *keep* them all! I put 'em in a little book so we can all…you know… "Remember when we did this, guys?" (Spoken in a voice like a proud teacher/parent.)

She explained exactly how her students responded to a strategy that was clearly intended for younger students.

P: "I did this in preschool. Give me the markers!" (R: Chuckles) They really, really like it. And some of them are like, "I'm too old for this!" (Female student voice.) And I'm like, "You're too old to be thankful…all of a sudden?...What?" And I had…I had one little boy last year and his hand covered *the entire page* and… "I'm so thankful. I'm thankful that my hand is so big because it means I have food." (Deep, male student voice.) (R: Chuckles) And some of the things are really nice like, "Oh, I'm thankful for…for you as a teacher. Or, thankful for my mom." And then some are really materialistic. "I'm thankful for my 700 pairs of new shoes." You know…but everybody can come up with five things that they're thankful for and some of the turkeys are fantastic! Like really, really just adorable! One thing that happened last year as a trend…they started drawing the turkeys as themselves. So, they'd have their hair, their make-up or whatever so the turkeys looked like the person who they were supposed to be. And they loved it! They really do like things like that. And, it's funny…they're like, "Oh!" (R: Adorable!)

Aside from the fun that they have in Paige's class, students were also delivered the message that she cared about them as individuals and it came through when she was asked about her perception about teaching in an urban district.

> P: (Pause) For me, I like it. I like teaching it because I feel like I can give students something that they most likely are not receiving in their lives. I do…I try really hard to treat each kid with dignity and respect and…you know…because I find that in doing so, that's what they give back to me. It's very much…what you put in is what you get out.

Paige's response that follows illustrated the point that she also cares about her students' life circumstances; however, she continued to maintain high standards for them.

> P: But, I do find a lot of people in the urban setting…(Sigh)…I almost want to say they view the kids as "throwaway kids." Maybe….you know…. "OK. I'm just here…." you know…like we were talking about… "for the paycheck." Or…you know…. "Well, they're never gonna learn anything so I'm gonna lower my standards and then maybe they'll get a little something." You know…but then…of course, ...the testing comes in…so, it's like… "Oh, no! I've got to teach these to pass the test." So, I think people aren't as respectful of what's going on in the kids lives as they need to be because there's a whole other…you know…12, 16…however many hours we don't see them….where we don't know….They could be the breadwinner. Or they could be helping be the breadwinner. They might not have lights that night. You know…they sure don't have…a lot of them don't have parents making them lunches the next day or caring about what they do. So, if…if I can be that one person in this urban school who shows them…hey, this is what an adult does…then, that's good. And, I find that a lot of people don't give the example that they need to…all the time. (R: Ok.) Nothing ever does (Unintelligible.)…But, maybe if we all just changed one thing, then maybe it would be better.

Paige was sensitive to some student's difficulties with reading but created a family environment where everyone felt safe to try. Upon entering Paige's class as a new student at the high school where she taught, a student perceived that she was a teacher who he could enlist to get him help with his reading challenges. He immediately felt that

Paige could be his advocate. Paige made the connection between creativity and reading

and described her students' reading abilities.

> P: There are students who struggle, struggle to read basic words. Um…To the point where I don't want to embarrass anybody by asking them even to read aloud. Which…you know…so there's always a few groups of students who, I'm like…Ok…I know that they can read this out loud…let's…they can read this. And I do try to…you know…mix it up a bit and get everybody out of their shell because we're all family. It's ok…you know…everybody makes mistakes. But, I've actually had a student this year who is 15 years old, "Miss, is there somebody at this school who can help me learn to read 'cuz I can read the words but I don't understand what they mean when they're all put together." So, you're telling me you've made it *to* high school, you are 15 and no one has bothered to check if you have reading comprehension. That's not ok! That's *really* not ok! (R: Um-hum) Because…I mean…that's…that's a second grade skill.

> P: And, I had to ask four different people before I could finally find somebody who said, "Oh, well we should hook him up with this." Unless…you know…so…I wish our resources were more *available* but also more advertised so we kinda knew what was out there. I think they kinda just throw you in with the wolves and expect you to know. (R: Um-hum) And if you don't know, you don't know.

> R: The student that approached you asking for assistance in reading, was this a one-to-one conversation?

> P: Um-hum. Um…It was…he's new to my class. I was asking him…you know, "Well, tell me about yourself. What's going on." And…uh…he…very casually, like it was no big deal…."I don't read really good. I understand the words but I don't know what they mean all put together." And I said, "Like comprehension? You don't understand?" He goes, "Yeah. I'm not really good at that. Is there somebody here who could help me?"

Not only does she feel like she and her students are family but she wants their

classroom to feel like home. No matter how much time it takes, she wants her students

to feel that she cares.

> P: But, I know…one thing I can say for sure is the kids notice when you put creativity into things and they *really* respond to it because it's so different from what they're seeing. "Uh…Ooh! Look at this." Or, just…you know…my room is decorated nicely. "Miss, this must have taken you hours to do this." And I'm

like, "Well, this is our home. This is where we spend a lot of time, so it has to look nice."

Miriam also expressed her belief that her students should feel the comfort of home at school.

> P: …the school…the classroom is their second home and it's where the majority of the time…you know…that they are there. (R: Um-hum) That really counts to me. (Chuckles)

Paul's family-like classroom environment exists because of the attention he gives to his students.

> R: What exactly do you mean when you say the kids look as you as their teacher? What, what does that entail or what's that like?
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> P: It uh…it's almost like a family status the same of 'em see you. 'Cuz some of 'em…you maybe…maybe, maybe you probably spend more time with them than…maybe…a lot of their, their family does at home. 'Cuz you do see them every single day and then you give them the attention every day that a lot of them are lacking. So, they latch onto you quite, quite a bit. (Chuckles) (R: Uh-huh)

Similar to Paige, Miriam shows her commitment to her students through her high standards and her refusal to let her bilingual students give up when they are confronted with language challenges.

> P: If, if I see those kids aren't ready…you know…to make the transition in their second language, I push them. I don't really allow them to stop. And the ones that are not ready because they haven't mastered their first language or their mother tongue first, those are the kids that take the test in Spanish.

The best illustration of the genuine care the participants have for their students is Miriam's stance that she treats her elementary students as if they were her own children. She believes that her fifth graders deserve the very best creative classroom experience in order to be successful.

P: It has to be a lot. Teachers have to put their....it's not just paper and pencil…it's not just having the kids sitting the whole time. To me, you know…looking at the perspective of having my children there…I am putting my, my own children in the classroom. I am treating my…my students are my own kids. And I want my kids to be kids in the activity classroom with hands-on, higher order thinking questions.

The participants' responses are proof of their perceptions that teacher's attitudes matter. They treat their students with dignity, respecting the individual child, their lives and their backgrounds, and they maintain a classroom environment based on mutually respectful relationships. Through their responses that relate to the theme of (1) *Importance of Teacher Attitude* and the second subtheme (b) *Genuinely Cares about Students*; it is evident that they are guided by their caring, student-centered attitudes.

Genuinely Cares about Teaching. It was clear that the teachers in this study were committed professionals and their responses served as evidence linked to the next subtheme: (c) *Genuinely Cares about Teaching*. Paul, who always wanted to be a teacher but did not become one until later in his life was always trying to be a better teacher.

P: I….I guess…I guess every year (Chuckles), I keep trying to come up with something new (Chuckles). 'Cuz I like to keep thinking to improve at the end of the year…even though I've never had a bad year but each year, I've tried to go up. And…uh…always gotta find a way to get them more into it every year and that's always a challenge. So, you think about maybe what you did last year but think maybe they would do it a little bit more if you could add something to it. And, always, the trick is…I guess…every year you gotta find something new to add. I feel like I'm almost working a show every year. And I'm the actor and I have to make it a little bit better. And, if not…maybe like the stand-up comic trying to keep the crowd involved. (Chuckles) (R: Uh-huh) So, they don't go to sleep on you.

Because of Paige's enthusiastic approach to her work, her students told her, "Miss, you always doin' the most."

R: Now, you mentioned they…they say that you're, "Doin' the most." Do they use that only talking about the room or your teaching….?

P: When you go overboard…(R: In any way…)…*Any* enthusiasm… "You're doin' the most!" (R: Laughs)

R: And they use that…they say that to you?

P: Yes. "Miss, you always doin' the most." (R: Laughs) I uh… 'cuz, what? You just met me? (R: Laughs)

But, in spite of the support she received from those on her team, Paige did not feel that her "doin' the most" and creativity was always met approvingly by some of her fellow teachers.

R: Is there anything you would like to add either about your experience as a teacher, your personal information, or any of the topics we're related to instruction or creativity?

P: You know the first thing that popped in my mind when you said that was… (Pause) I almost feel like a lot of times I'm really shy about…It's…a…strange sort of thing cause I want everybody to know what I'm doing…Like…"Oh my god, I totally think this is awesome…we should all do it…and it worked out so great. Weeee!" But I find a lot of people don't necessarily want to hear about it. So, like…um…I have to really pick my audience because I kinda feel like people are like, "Oh, you're showing off. Or, I would never do that. Or, that would never work with my kids." You know what I mean? (R: I do.) So I do…I want to share my ideas but I feel like a lot of times they wouldn't be received. *Or,* I feel like a lot of times…well, that particular person couldn't do that because they don't have the same…you know…relationship with the kids or they just don't have the same amount of craziness that I have and it wouldn't work for them.

In spite of Paige's reluctance to share her creativity at times, she still maintained her genuinely caring attitude about teaching.

P: My bottom line is I want to do a good job…

Miriam expressed her gratitude for having the opportunity to participate in this study and to express her passion for teaching.

R: Ok. All right. Any thing else that you can think of?

P: Uh…I just want to say, "Thank you for this honor. This is an honor for me to be part of this…uh…survey." Because I know that I have the passion for teaching kids. I love social studies. And I know that social studies is not just teaching social studies, it's using creative writing…uh…reading…implementing all content into social studies.

The passion for teaching was evident with each of the participants; it was obvious that they *genuinely care about teaching*. Unfortunately, from Paige's response, it appeared that a teacher's commitment to creativity was not always well received by others.

Genuinely Values Creativity. The fourth and final subtheme under the major theme of (1) *Importance of Teacher Attitude* is the subtheme of (d) *Genuinely Values Creativity*. Not only did Paige express the importance of creativity as it related to school success including in other subjects but, also, her belief that everybody is creative.

P: I think if they are creative, they can make almost anything work. Like if they have to write a paper for English and they're creative and they can think of a good angle or a good topic or a good way to present a topic, that's half the battle (R: Um-hum) especially, you know, if the teacher is not getting great work. And…just a little…a little bit of effort…a little bit of creativity is going to knock their socks off! You know…or…you know…get *out* a poster board and draw something! It doesn't even have to be good but you're still doing it. And I always tell them, "Nobody ever…you never ever said in preschool, 'I can't draw!' You just did!" You know…nobody ever said, "Oh, I can't sing." when you're a little kid, you just did! You know, it wasn't about what you were good at or what you were bad at or if that's what you participated in (R: Um-hum) …I say, "Everybody's creative!" (R: Um-hum) Everybody can think of a different way or something new. Everybody! (R: Um-hum) But you just have to figure out what it is. And sometimes it's just a little bit…umph! You don't even have to do that much.

With her experience teaching pre-school and with her successful use of pre-school activities with high school students, Paige could offer insights into encouraging children's creativity regardless of their age.

> R: Between the preschool children that think that their artistic and singing skills are right up there…What happens between that level and 17 year olds or…or (Sigh) juniors in high school in U.S. History? What has happened that…that causes them to…
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> P: Somewhere along the line someone has said, "Oh, you're not much of a singer." or, "Oh, that's not a very good drawing." Or maybe not even in that many words; but, it's just not something that was either fostered in them or something that they did after that certain age that they just think, "Oh, that's not me." But then…you know…you have some kids who are like, "I *am* an artist!" and they have these beautiful, beautiful drawings. But I think everybody can…oh, everybody…"Oh, I'm not a singer!" "Does your voice work?" "You are a singer! You might not be good. Nobody's that good." (R: Um-hum) "But, you are a singer! Can you pick up a pen and do something? (R: Um-hum) You're an artist. It doesn't have to be good. You just have to try!" And I think a lot of people because they are afraid of failure – especially in those middle school years – where you think every single person is looking and judging you, you don't even want to try because, "Ah! I'm going to different! Ah! I might get picked on! What if…what if it's wrong? What if it's bad?"

Paige believed that the fear of failure or different affected student creativity to the point to where they simply quit taking the risk.

> P: And then I really think it is middle school where you pack yourself up and you don't take anything back out. You're just like…"Nope! I'm not good at that. That's not what I do!" because you were afraid that somebody was gonna make fun of you or you weren't going to be as good as you thought, so don't even try.

Once again, Paige's passion for creativity was evident along with her belief that everybody had the potential to be creative when she commented that, "…everybody's got something in them that they want to get out…"

> R: On top of that fear of failure or criticism, do you think that there are as many opportunities that are afforded to children to exercise their creativity as they get older?

P: No. No. As they get older the workload gets harder and then…you know… the specter of standardized testing…It doesn't take a creative person to fill in a bubble. (R: Um-hum) You know, and they're not asked about…"Oh, well what are you good at? What are your talents?" Cause the STAAR test doesn't *care* what you're good at. It cares about one thing and that's what it measures. So, you know you could be this fantastic singer, this artist, you could be an actress. You could do a million things great but if you don't take a good test then STAAR test says you're a failure. And because the schools are all about the scores, then all of a sudden…"Well, you didn't do well on the STAAR test, you can't have that elective." Or, they will put you in this remedial class.

Paige's comment illustrated how student performance on the state-mandated test

can be linked to high school course selections and student creativity.

P: You know…and, there's just not a lot of chance for people to be creative…So, at least not creative on paper…or make something…or sculpt…or sing…or…do…Which   is   why   you   see   the   kids…(Knocks   on   the desk.)…knock…knock…knock… banging on the desk. I think everybody's got something in them that they want to get out and they're constantly…you know… rapping. And if you look at the way they're dressed, they're trying to express themselves. And…you know…more and more, I feel like we're taking that away from them. Because…"You're making noise." and "Oh, you can't wear your pants like that." Nobody likes their pants like that. We all get that! But, if that's what they do, that's what they do. Uh…you know…it's just the same thing as, "Oh! Mini skirts!" or girls wearing pants. Or, what? The bell-bottoms. You know all the things that once were, "Ah! Shocking!" and "Oh, my god! You can't do that!" You know…What? In 50 years, we're all gonna be like…a fad. (R: Um-hum) What are we getting so excited about?

One reason Paul valued creativity was because it motivated his students to

participate to be successful.

P: If, if they like it they will seem to do better. And if they don't like your class, they don't seem to want to participate. Especially with the type of kids we have, you gotta get them to participate. And if they're not participating, you'll never have success. So, it's just…matching something that they like to do with something we need them to do and get the combination to get them to actually do it for us. (Chuckles)

Karen was in agreement with Paul when she explained the value of creativity when it came to student motivation and success.

> P: I feel like creativity is the…is the…uh…uh…the turning point to getting student engaged, I feel like engaged students who are allowed to be creative, who are allowed to learn on their own speed with their own desire and their own time and who are allowed to fail and make mistakes and correct those mistakes are the students that are lifelong learners and that are learning deeper and stronger. And to me, that is…that is absolutely lends themselves to school success. Uh…I would hands down take a student who would like to learn that way versus a student who was ritualistic and could make straight A's and who could make the teacher happy. You know…I know that that student will suffer later in life versus the student who goes out there and owns their learning and pursues their learning and is allowed to be creative. Those are the students that are going to be the new Steve Jobs or multimillionaires.

Karen went on to detail how creativity adds to student potential later in life. She terms her creative approach to learning as being the opposite of just filling a bucket.

> P: Our paths are…uh…you know…from the earliest days…um….our life experiences shape what kind of a learner and what kind of success in life we will have. And that's not to say that it can't be changed. But if that type of learning and that success is built early on then it will continue as an adult. Very few people change that path. So, if you are encouraged in school and your learning is valued and your learning is important and you see a rhyme or a reason to it and you experienced success on a regular basis then more than likely you will be a lifelong learner. The learning will extend far beyond the school day. Um…we already see students in school who…who given that opportunity will learn on their own time at night and on the weekends. (R: Um-hum) And they'll continue and they'll come in on Monday excited and say, "Guess what I found out about this? I did some research and I found this." You know…versus our kids that are just straight down the line type learners. They tend to just learn just as much as they need to get by and that's it. So, it's just the filling of a bucket approach is just not what's best for the way our kids learn.

Helen concurred with Paul and Karen about the motivating influence of creativity with her students and went even farther to say that it motivates them to want to come to school.

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P: I believe that you need that creativity in the school to keep the children motivated and learning; to keep them actively wanting to participate…wanting to come to school.

And, Miriam was in agreement that creativity affects all facets of a student's school experience including their enthusiasm, their behavior, and their attendance and their success beyond school. This is she explained its importance:

P: It has to be. It's all. It's all. To me, it's all because if one classroom is boring then it starts with behavior problems; not consistency. But if the kids see that the teacher is using creativity and they are applying creativity in the classroom, the kids will feel excited every time. They will want…want to go school…you know…every day. And I have been experiencing this because I can hear that from kids, "I want to be in your classroom because you [have] different activities for us." (R: Um-hum…uh-huh) You see…it's exposing to different creativity activities for them. (R: Yes. Yes.)

Faith's perception was that creativity helped her students to succeed in her class and, like Karen's belief; it will help her students even past their elementary school days.

P: It helps them visualize…you know…exactly *what* was happening (R: Um-hum) so they have a picture in their minds not just a picture in a textbook.

R: Ok. What do you think creativity will have to do with your children's success beyond school; beyond your classroom; beyond their education?

P: I think it's gonna be huge because it's just gonna give 'em all of those experiences that they need to continue learning…continue to *want* to learn. Um…I know I learned out of a textbook and history…and social studies….was one of my least favorite subjects because all we did was *read*. And I think with that creativity they want to learn more and they're excited about it and so, it just makes them understand it (R: Um-hum) and get it. (R: Um-hum)

Paige clearly valued creativity when she proclaimed, "How boring and colorless and lifeless and drab would your life be without creativity?"

P: (Sigh) And, I am encompassing the idea…not only to create something but to create something in your mind. For example, where you're reading for pleasure. You know if I could find just *10* kids who read books for pleasure, those are creative people because they're seeing these fantastic pictures in their minds.

But, then…you know….it's gonna take some…what?....some…for a lot of these kids…they're not gonna make their way out of the socioeconomic layer that they're in. It's gonna take creativity for them to find and keep jobs. It's gonna take creativity for them to take the resources that they're given to make a nice house to live in. To…to make the most of what they have and it's not told to them step-by-step because they're never been allowed to create or think or do outside the box or make choices for themselves. They're not gonna be able to do that.

Paige's response showed the value of creativity to the individual but also to our nation and its future.

P: And it's gonna be very frustrating for our country as a whole when we have a whole generation of kids who have to be told step-by-step what to do when a little of creativity…"Hey! We could do this!...Oh, we have this problem." 'Cause there's a lot of problems that are about to…you know…come up….that they're gonna have to be creative to fix or else they're just not gonna get fixed.

To summarize, it was clear that all of the participants valued creativity when they responded as follows: it motivated their students to participate in class; it motivated their students to behave appropriately; and, it promoted students' enthusiasm for a specific class, their enthusiasm for coming to school and for learning in general. As a result, their beliefs supported the importance of the theme (1) *Importance of Teacher Attitude* and the subtheme of (d) *Genuinely Values Creativity*.

Environment. Continuing with the findings in response to the second research question, "How do they encourage creativity in their students?" revealed insights into the teachers' perceptions about the classroom setting and the next major theme emerged: (2) *Environment* with the subthemes: (a) *Safe*; (b) *Flexible*; and, (c) *Engaging*.

Safe. The first subtheme related to the classroom environment that might encourage creativity in students related to it being (a) Safe. Several participants made

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their classrooms a safe learning environment where students were free to express their

opinions. Miriam explained how she allowed for students to share their opinions.

> P: And, I'm flexible when the kids tell me, "Miss._____, I really want this." They have the right to tell me what they really want because it's their classroom. (R: Um-hum) And, I don't have any behavior problems because they feel that I care about what they say.

She gave an example of how students know that she values their opinions.

> P: They know that. They know that. Because it's not just…"This is what the teacher told me to do and this is what I will follow." I really ask the kids what they really want… (R: Um-hum) That really counts to me. (Chuckles)

Karen looked at students as being a teacher's "clients" thereby giving their voice

great weight and value. She even added that in her classroom, "students help drive

instruction" and offered an illustration.

> P: Uh…well, obviously, students are our clients…they're our…our…they're the people that we judge our teaching by. And so, if it's not enjoyable and effective with 'em then why are we doing it? And so I often would stop, I would poll them; I would survey them. I would ask them do they want more? I would give 'em choice. You know…we are going over this particular concept, would you like me to teach it this way or this way. And I would get…I would get their opinions in advance and we would try something and if it didn't work…uh…If it was an activity that really wasn't working or clicking, I would say, "You know what, guys, how many of you vote to abandon this activity and try something else?" So, the idea that, again, students can help drive that instruction. I know that a good teacher can be delivering a lesson and know if that lesson is hitting their students or grabbing their students. And, and teacher observation is a *very* strong tool but student input is as strong if not stronger.

Paul also showed that he valued student input particularly when, to put it in his

terms, he felt he had made a "bad move" instructionally and things weren't going well.

He shared an instance that happened the day of the interview.

> P: And…I did tod...when my second class came in today I said, "I'm gonna try it a little bit different (R: Laughs) …cause it was a little bit boring." And they kinda looked at me and I said, "So, if you're not having fun, you better tell me at

the end what else ya'll want to do with this because we gotta make this fun. 'Cuz, I was just bored for an hour." I was hoping there…and then a couple of 'em they threw out ideas. "Or, we can do it on the board together." And, they, they gave me some things. And I said, "What do you want to do with it?" And, I took into consideration all reasonable ones that…where we still stayed on task. (R: Absolutely.) Anything that was just to get out of work, we didn't do.

Paul went on to say that he considered his students' ideas, made appropriate modifications to instruction, and described the collaboration between him and his students as them working it out.

Paige made her classroom a safer environment for struggling readers to try their hand at reading aloud in class.

> P: There are students, who struggle, struggle to read basic words. Um…To the point where I don't want to embarrass anybody by asking them even to read aloud. Which…you know…so there's always few groups of students who, I'm like…Ok…I know that they can read this out loud…let's…they can read this. And I do try to…you know…mix it up a bit and get everybody out of their shell because we're all family. It's ok…you know…everybody makes mistakes.

Paul's choices of classroom furniture also provide a safer environment for his students. One of the reasons Paul favored tables and chairs rather than student desks in his classroom was due to his consideration for those students who could not sit in a desk. Paul was building on his safe classroom environment in this example where he considered his student's physical needs.

> P: And some of 'em have a tough time fitting in the desks. With the chairs, everybody fits in the chair. The tables are high. You have lots of room. So, you have almost twice the room you did before. So, that's…that's fixed our problem that we were…you know…that was almost unfixable before when you only had a desk and some kid's come to you, "I can't sit in a desk." (R: Right.) You can't say, "Sit on the floor." And in the past…ask…if they can have a chair because they wouldn't f…they couldn't squeeze into a desk. So… (R: Oh.)

The participants' responses indicated that a safe learning environment was a priority to them. Their sensitivity to all of their students' needs and their willingness to leave space for their students to voice their opinions all established a nonthreatening environment within which their students could exercise their creativity.

Flexible. The participants establishing boundaries and rules and yet maintaining flexibility within those boundaries also established that classroom climate. That balance made their classrooms creative spaces. Faith indicated that she expanded creativity in her classroom by providing a safe, structured environment. Her statement not only illustrated the importance of the balance between structure and creativity but it also provides a transition to the next subtheme (b) Flexible, as it relates to the major theme (2) Environment. This is how Faith explained the balance she aimed to maintain:

> P: I think if you…I think structure in your classroom is….the kids knowing what to do everyday and I don't think creativity takes away from that. If they walk into your classroom everyday and they know exactly what they're going to do then that's structure for them and you can pull creativity all over the place as long as it's a safe (R: Um-hum), structured environment, they can run with it.

Paul's response indicated how he maintained structure while guiding students outside of their comfort zones in his class of high school students. For example, changing the classroom configuration to align with instructional needs was a consideration.

> P: Some of 'em…uh…there's a small number that it bothers cause they like to have their one, little set seat. But the more I've done it, the more they've gotten used to it. But, they can come to the room and they can look at the design of the room and know what we're doing that day. (R: Ok.) And then they know…what's funny…some of 'em will come to the door and, it's like, "Oh! It's a fun day." Or, "Oh, oh! It's the note day; the serious day." Or, "It's test day." And they can tell ahead of time. But they do have a…we do have one standard set up we keep that is a…what we do…I say most of the time. At least a couple

of days of the week. And…they know it…they…I have a seating chart they go by. And they come in that day and it's, "Back to your regular seat and let's get serious 'cuz we're doing…you know…" That's more of the straightforward day (R: Ok.) where I have to give 'em some information and then I need them to take it and put it into their interactive notebooks and I need 'em just to listen and not…we need…that'd be our quiet days. Maybe that would be the way some people would refer to it as.

He then went on to show how he altered the classroom while still monitoring students' comfort levels related to the changes.

P: And then after we…they've got the materials…then, I do the interaction day and that's when I start dividing up the room. And then for review day, we have a…a couple of different reviews we do. And they will come in and they will look at the room and know what kind of review it is. (R: Uh-huh) If it's a…maybe a teacher directed review then we'll go back to almost straight tables and they go back to their assigned seat. We're doing a BINGO review tomorrow so I'm leaving it in a big square and I will stand in the middle and be like a game host and go through it. (R: Ok.) Cause I want the interaction. I want them speaking to me the whole time. And they don't have to sit there and be quiet. (R: Yes.) So, they'll come in tomorrow and see what's the deal: the fun day.

And, when Paul sensed that the flexible classroom arrangement was potentially detrimental to student learning, he knew to offer options to alleviate the stress. Paul was always prepared to offer students an alternative.

P: But others will come in…there are [a] couple that…and I had to talk to they…this bothers. So there are a couple of tables that I have maybe set to a side…where…and I told 'em when you come in you can always have that one when we do this. (R: Um-hum) And, they know they still have their spot. But there probably is one or two each class. (R: Uh-huh) But, some of 'em that initially said that…now, the longer we've done it, seem to like it more and they're not going to their spots anymore. (Chuckles) (R: Yes.) So it does take 'em time but a lot of 'em, I guess maybe your antisocial, quiet, reserved ones (R:Um-hum), they don't care for it at all in the beginning. They find it very troublesome.

R: Well, it sounds like though even with the constant change, there are established routines that would be comforting to them.

P: Right. And they do like that. (R: Yeah.) 'Cuz they do…you gotta give 'em the seating chart because they want their seat even though they tell you they don't want a seat, they want their spot. (R: Right.) But, they…they are ok with having their spot two to three days a week and a couple of days a week…they want …to a different spot. 'Cuz they always get to go back and they still have their spot. (Chuckles)

Helen gave a similar example of her creative, flexible use of her instructional space and the excitement it built with her students.

P: Well, my students never really know what the room is going to look like (Chuckles) when they walk in. If we're doing an activity that requires that they sit in rows, we may be sitting in rows. If we're having a class discussion, we may have all the desks in one giant circle in the classroom…around the classroom. If they're working in groups…if they're in pairs, the desks will be in pairs…if they're in threes or fours, the desks will be in threes or fours. Sometimes we need the class divided in half and the desks may be divided…you know, in half facing each other for their conversations. That instructional space changes daily depending on the activities of the students. And,…uh…they truly get used to never knowing what it's going to be like and, and I think that's part of the creativity is when the kids walk in the first time or when they walk by and the classroom chairs are different, they are already excited because they want to know what we're going to do today because the desks have never been in this position before.

Helen also felt flexibility was a good classroom management tool and gave a detailed example of its positive impact upon her students.

P: I think it's a good thing because they are anxious to come class to see what's going to happen. Um…They kind of know if it's just in straight rows, it's gonna be a mundane day. And, honestly, you have a harder time getting them to go to their seat…you know…it's like, "Come in. Sit down. Come in. Sit down." And, getting them to go to that assigned seat…um…is more difficult on those days. Um…They know when it's mixed up that they'll come in and have a seat and they'll be excited because they'll have their friends sitting at their seats in…you know…in their groups with them. And,…um…sometimes they get to stay in those groups. Sometimes they don't get to stay in those groups. Sometimes, I chose the groups. Sometimes, I go to the group and say, "Are you going to have the best grade you can have if you…the four of you work together? And, they will look at each other and they may split up. They may say, "Well, we'll try it." And, sometimes, sometimes it works better because their friends will encourage someone to do better than what they were going to do. Sometimes,…um…less

often, I believe, they will not…you know…less often, well they get in trouble. And, so, most of the time I let the kids choose whose going to be together unless I know for sure that it's going to be an issue. (R: Um-hum) But, for the most part my kids get to choose who their partners are.

Paige explained the way in which she balanced consistency and creativity as they related to the standards she set for both her students and herself.

P: I think that my urban student…the kids I have now, find me approachable. Because like I mentioned before, I am respectful to them. I am polite to them. I have a very clear set of standards that we adhere to. And, I think consistent. Like, I'm always the same. They know when they come to my room, these rules are happening. So, I think when things are…you know…shaky maybe…for them somewhere else, they can come to me and they know that…they can almost guess what I'm gonna say because of my consistency…

She then explained how she allowed for creativity while maintaining consistent adherence to the rules she had established for her classroom.

P: No, because I'm consistent. 'Cuz I consistently will do things that I expect…or they don't expect. So, they know that our *rules* are consistent. Because we're consistent but we're having fun. (R: Yeah.) But as far as the consistency…the dichotomy of consistent and creative, our rules are always gonna be the same. (R: Ok.) They know what the expectations are but they never know what we're gonna do.

Helen referred to it as, "changing the creativity" with her middle school students.

P: Um…And, that it takes creativity and it takes changing the creativity, changing the activities, changing the routine to keep the students involved, to keep the school moving forward…um…(R: Um-hum). You almost can't have…you have to have routine…but you almost can't have routine in an urban school because children find a way around the routine. And, um…what I noticed, noticed most definitely in the last five years as the population has changed even more is that the students are fighting routine so, therefore, you have to be creative and you have to change up…um... the way things are done throughout the entire school day, (R: Um-hum), the, the entire school year.

Paul made the connection between him being flexible and his students performing to their maximum potential.

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P: (Pause….) Oh (Commented quietly under his breath.)…I'm just trying to picture some of them that I have that I know are underperforming…and…uh…ya…the more the…(Unintelligible.)…today with what I tried with 'em and that is why I kept changing 'em cause I was looking at some of 'em…and if they can't find…some way to get some interest into it, they're not going to do any thing. So, you have to…just find something in what you're doing…if you can't get 'em any interest at all then you're not going to be able to do anything. But if they like it a little bit…and if you can find something they like and adjust it to 'em…not be maybe as strict with your rules when you give it to 'em. Today, some people would have saw what I was doing as a…you could do a straightforward graphic organizer. Others saw it as a very artistic collage of stuff. Some of the kids saw it as a good chance to get out…and I mixed it all up on the board and they come rewrite it but they couldn't use my words, they had to use their own words. And then we had different people come and restate it in their own words. And then I gave them a variety of colors and some just wanted to go up there and be as colorful as popular. And so, when they turned in their work, I told them they could turn it in however they…as long as they covered every topic and I could make sense of it, I didn't care how it really looked just to be creative and make sure we answered everything.

Paul then described how his flexibility would impact both what a visitor to his classroom would observe and the variety of student products. He took great pride in his students' work and the creativity it exhibited.

P: So, when I was going through grading it today, anybody walking in would have thought, "That's a very bazaar stack you have in front of you!" (R: Laughs) But, it was the Bill of Rights and…uh…probably 10 different ways in every class from very boring to very colorful…and if you'd been in the room at the end, it…it was all discussion and all interaction and the kids were talking the whole time. And it was all about…"You can't say what they said and re-say." And…it was just…(Chuckles)…uh…but the only way I was able to get everyone involved was to let 'em do it however [it] interested them…(R: Right.)…so long as they could do that…the ones that…if I'd made it very strict, they wouldn't have done it.

Engaging. Each of the participants described what an inviting learning environment looked like and their descriptions can be explained as the final characteristic of the major theme (2) *Environment*, which is the subtheme (c) *Engaging*. Paige's classroom environment looked inviting because there was evidence that

engaging learning happened there. Paige did that by displaying the work of her junior

U.S. History students throughout her classroom. She described it this way:

> P: (Deep breath.) Um…Well to use one of our buzz words that's floating around school, "Print rich." (R: Oh.) Lots of colors. Lots of…I have a lot of personal items up or stuff that we don't necessarily use at home anymore but it's still nice so let's bring it up to the school. I have lots of plants…not real…they're fake…but they still give it a sense of, "We're not in this…you know…institutionalized (Dramatic voice.)…" And, color, color, color and every available space has something hanging on it or off of it. Um… one of the greatest parts of the decoration are mobiles that the kids made. You know…so anything that we can make into like a one sheet….you know….I'm hanging down off the ceiling…so it's like they walk in and, "Oh, wow! Look at all our stuff!" …is now decorating…

Paige's practices regarding creating an inviting learning environment extended

beyond the four walls of her classroom and connected to students' pride in their school

and to her own family.

> P: "Our stuff is *good enough* to be decorating!" You know and I'm always trying to foster school pride cause they talk about, "Aw! Nobody cares about our school." And, I'm like…or their favorite thing to say is, "Miss, this is _____(School name)." And I always tell them, "I don't want you to say it like it's something bad. I want you to say, this is _____ (School name)!" You know…like…just put a different spin on it. Like, "Of course we did that, we're _____ (School name). Not, "You better hide your phone, Miss, 'cuz this is _____(School name)." (R: Right.) You know what I'm sayin'? (R: Exactly.) I have a whole wall behind my desk that's pictures of me, pictures of my kids, pictures of what we do and where we go.

Paige believed that the learning environment should be engaging and a reflection

of the creative people and creative things that happen there. Her students describe her

efforts as, "Doin' the most."

> P: You know…um…the kids use the term for when you overdo something called, "Doin' the most." "Miss, you're doing the *most*! Every day you're doing the most." (Student voice.) (Laughs) So, I guess the creative classroom *looks* creative. It has color. It's a reflection of you. I mean…and I tell them…like I

said before, "This is where I live a good portion of my time. Why would I want it to look like a hospital room or a prison? Let's make it look nice!" I mean…I have this stuff…you know…let's do this! Yeah! You know…and they're always like, "Ooh! Yeah! (R: Um-hum) How come every teacher doesn't do this?" (Student voice.) (R:Um-hum) "I do not know. Because don't they have to live there?"

According to Paul, his classroom environment appeared engaging because of the variety of things that are going on at any one time. He described what he would be doing and what the students would be doing as well.

> P: See a…probably lots of…engagement…probably a lot of interaction. 'Cuz, I guess if you're being creative, it probably takes everybody in there. If, if you're not creative…maybe you're doing something…I would picture in my mind kids sitting in straight rows sitting there working on a worksheet out of a book. 'Cuz obviously that would probably be the least creative. The more creative would be the more…more different things taking place in the classroom. And I don't mean chaos so the kids not doing off task stuff. I would say if maybe you came in and saw 'em working together. You saw them in…involved with what they were doing. Not necessarily the teacher doing …you know…could still be in the middle of the room just going around assisting to help 'em get through each of their activities. 'Cause I find when they go the best….days when I would just stand in my room. I was looking around and I just kept thinking, "This is going really well." And…uh… if anybody opened my door, everybody was really into it and they were …uh…all had out their markers and they had their books and they were pointing to each other and talking to each other. And…but that was uh…probably was…I was thinking what's the best moment of each class. (R: Uh-huh) And so that would be like, like my most boring moment 'cuz I would tell 'em, "If you need help, just ask me 'cuz I'm just bored standing here." (R: Laughs) But they were engaged doing something that thought they were having a good time. (R: Sure.) That would be crea…I guess… a creative class to me.

Similar to Paul's class of high school students, Faith described that a visitor to her fifth grade classroom might see a variety of means being offered to differentiate and meet all of her student's needs creatively.

> P: I think a creative classroom…you're gonna see…it's gonna look busy…it may not be quiet…um…there's gonna be lots different things going on…not everybody doing the same thing. 'Cause also, when I think of creativity I think of differentiation…you know…this kid needs to work on this; so that's what

they're doing…you know…I have a group with me that's working on something else. I've got a GT kid over here who's…they already know everything (Laughs) and you don't need to tell 'em anything. So they're doing their own…own thing. So just a number of…it's…it all flows and it's all the same thing (R: Um-hum) but it's individualized for that kid's needs.

However, Faith's elementary school no longer focused on discovery learning so the classroom environment had changed. Faith explained that the instructional looks different now.

> P: Um…I feel like my kids are at their desks a lot more. Used to…um…we had what we called, "DIY stations" with discovery approach learning. So, "Do It Yourself"…it would be material we've taught and they…when they have an opportunity, they would go to that station and work on it. So I feel like now, my students are more stationary. Um…there's not as much movement in the classroom.

Again, Miriam's response indicated a belief similar to the other participants that students were actively engaged in a wide range of activities including leadership and ownership roles in her [creative] classroom.

> P: A creative classroom…for me…looks like having different projects…different stations for them…moving from one station to the other…they…they discuss…they work cooperatively between each other….Uh…they act as coaches…they have leadership…ownership…and the teacher is the facilitator during that time.

Karen also emphasized that her students would be engaged in communicating and collaborating in what she refers to as "free style" learning. To use her words, Karen elaborated about the classroom in her "dream world."

> P: Um…I did not…I, I, I never believed in rows…um…I would try grouping my students as many ways as I could with different random groupings that students were allowed to self select. Um…a lot of times…uh…the…the desks in the rows inhibit collaboration and communication…often times and so…trying to find different types of placement of tables and desks in my room was an ongoing battle with me given the available resources and space that we had. So, uh…a lot

of times we would push all the desks up against the walls and we would make our groupings on the floor 'cuz we could free style a little bit more there.

And it's these examples of safe, flexible, and engaging classroom environments that created spaces where creativity was developed and, to use the words of Helen and Miriam, that provided the type of learning that kept students wanting to come to school.

Strategies. Finally, the second research question, "How do they encourage creativity in their students? was associated with the activities teachers use and the way in which they are implemented. These responses were combined under the third major theme (3) Strategies. First, Helen's response in which she outlined how she created lessons reflects that regardless of the strategies used, learning must be important.

> P: When I create lessons, I go forth looking…starting with the basic concrete and moving to the abstract. How do you take the facts that you gained and use them and how do these facts affect history? How do they affect the way we progressed as a society? And, having the students think about that. How…how do the things we do today affect tomorrow? Um…doing activities such as learning stations where they are given some facts but they do activities them and how do these facts affect us today? How do we …um…how do use what we learn from that war to keep us from having a war today. How do we use these strategies that a government in 1800 used to solve a problem? How do we take what they learned and make it part of our society today to ensure that our society doesn't have that problem again in the future? Um…And, I believe that's what's so important is keeping the child's mind thinking of how this social studies lesson affects us today. How does it…how…bottom line…how does it affect us today? How do you take what you learn and use it?

Helen also emphasized that strategies need to engage students in a variety of ways in order to encourage them to think and to develop their own creativity.

> P: And, keeping the student's minds engaged. They're thinking. They're wandering. And, when they wander…not wander…when they wonder, they…it instills something in their mind. It's something for them to think about that they can recall again in the future. Those hands-on activities: um…them getting in a photograph and creating the conversation that's taking place for them to be able to empathize and sympathize…um…with what's taking place. Uh…those kinds

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of activities develop their crea…their own creativity and stimulate their desire to learn.

According to Paul, not only must learning be important but it must also be relevant to students' lives and interests. Paul also stressed the value of his flexibility in giving students choices and, when trying to encourage students' creativity, Paul simply stated for to them to be creative.

> P: (Pause….) Oh (commented quietly under breath)…I'm just trying to picture some of them that I have that I know are underperforming…and…uh…ya…the more the…(Unintelligible)…today with what I tried with 'em and that is why I kept changing 'em cause I was looking at some of 'em…and if they can't find…some way to get some interest into it, they're not going to do any thing. So, you have to…just find something in what you're doing…if you can't get 'em any interest at all then you're not going to be able to do anything. But if they like it a little bit…and if you can find something they like and adjust it to 'em…not be maybe as strict with your rules when you give it to 'em. Today, some people would have saw what I was doing as a…you could do a straightforward graphic organizer. Others saw it as a very artistic collage of stuff. Some of the kids saw it as a good chance to get out…and I mixed it all up on the board and they come rewrite it but they couldn't use my words, they had to use their own words. And then we had different people come and restate it in their own words. And then I gave them a variety of colors and some just wanted to go up there and be as colorful as popular. And so, when they turned in their work, I told them they could turn it in however they…as long as they covered every topic and I could make sense of it, I didn't care how it really looked just to be creative and make sure we answered everything.

The end result was Paul got students, including those who might typically be underperforming in school, involved and producing creative work.

> P: So, when I was going through grading it today, anybody walking in would have thought, "That's a very bazaar stack you have in front of you!" (R: Laughs) But, it was the Bill of Rights and…uh…probably 10 different ways in every class from very boring to very colorful…and if you'd been in the room at the end, it…it was all discussion and all interaction and the kids were talking the whole time. And it was all about…"You can't say what they said and re-say." And…it was just…(Chuckles)…uh…but the only way I was able to get everyone involved was to let 'em do it however [it] interested them…(R: Right.)…so long

as they could do that…the ones that…if I'd made it very strict, they wouldn't have done it.

Karen addressed the issue of anchoring learning with her middle school students through the use of creative strategies in their student notebooks or journals. Again, there was mention of flexibility on the part of the teacher and the pride of ownership students exhibited in their journals that are kept throughout the year.

P: I think that if you anchor their learning, some basic learning, then it frees them up to be creative about what they're doing. And, I think that without that initial anchoring, the creativity might exist but it's really not going anywhere or getting off the ground. Um…I know in American History for example, there…there are facts that kids just have to know, period. They can't get around not knowing 'em. And once they can get that basic material under their belt and into their learning that frees them up to start thinking about the reasons and the history behind the way the facts work. So, it…it's like an anchoring point for their creativity.

Karen went on to explain the use of the notebook in detail. Once again, she referred to her creative, flexible approach as being "free style."

P: Well, I…uh…obviously was introduced by someone years ago to interactive notebooks and then took it over and kind of used the History Alive! Model but modified it. Um…and I kinda combined interactive notebooks with Foldables with as a way of anchoring kids' learning and anchoring their concept of how and idea comes together and the parts of it and the pieces of it. And…uh…kind of blended several of those different theories and practices into what we considered our working interactive notebook. And it was amazing to me as a teacher in a secondary school…and I might be responsible for…I think one, one year I had 180 students, so I always carried a large number of students and it amazed me about how much ownership the kids took…took in their notebooks and how particular they were about 'em and how much they referred to them and understood that they really were helpful to their learning. So…and…and it wasn't…you know…dyed in the wool…they had to do it this way…a lot of kids would free style different things. Those free style approaches sometimes became part of my approach for the next year. So, the kids were teaching me how to learn some things, which I really enjoyed. But…uh…it was a good way to anchor American History with students. (R: Ok.) Very effective.

Paul explained a similar experience with his eleventh grade students and their

journals.

> P: It's um…uh…I've been doing them 10 years now and every year it's for them more creative 'cuz, they really like to have something that belongs to 'em. And they are very eager…when you tell…But a lot of people say, "Yeah. They have a hard time bringing supplies." I've never had a problem. My first year there, everybody said, "You'll have to go buy their supplies." So, I went and bought 'em all notebooks and there…those…it was my worst year ever for it. 'Cuz I handed it to 'em when they came in. They didn't bring it themselves. I gave 'em standard ones. I just went and bought several cases of 'em. Everybody's looked alike. They didn't pay for them. They didn't care about em. They didn't keep up 'em. They destroyed 'em. Now, I ask 'em to bring 'em one and within the first week or so, they all show up.

Again, Paul provided his students with a variety of options for processing and

displaying their learning telling them, "it's gotta be creative" and "don't bore me." The

end result was the "all of their notebooks looked different" and students were proud of

their creative efforts.

> P: Every time I move to an era, I start with a cover page and I tell 'em, it's gotta be creative. I don't give 'em a table of contents. We go day by day. And I give 'em a variety of ways to put stuff in there. And, I tell 'em they have to decorate the cover page. And they always ask me, "What has to be on it?" And I tell them the era and I tell 'em it's gotta be creative. And they always ask me, "What that means?" And I say, "When I look at your notebook, don't bore me." (R: Laughs.) And… "Can I put anything?" "Anything from that era. Anything appropriate." And so, all of their notebooks look different.

Paul gave a specific example of options he offered students on the cover pages

for each unit of study in their journal.

> P: They decorate the cover page…and it goes into…and then I tell 'em, "And if it's really creative you get extra points, now." Some of 'em will ask, "Why do we have to do that?" And I tell 'em 'cuz it's an easy way…And I say, "You know we're doing the 60s today." They know where that cover page is. "We're doing the 20s." They know where that cover page is. And, when we're covering an era for about two weeks I always say, when they walk in the door, "Get to your cover page." And then…I used to go to certain ways of notes and it doesn't really

work… 'cuz…And I tried…we've learned different ways to teach and take notes. I've tried to…do the new ways. Now, I kinda give them about three ways at the first of the year and then tell 'em that if they have a better way, and it makes sense and I come around and look at it, then they can do it that way. Long as it works for them and they're engaged while we're doing it. And always…part of it is what I say…and part of it has to be in their own words. As long as they put that in there, I'm ok with it. So, I'll say something. Then, they…you know… put it down in their way. And, if they don't like pen, they can use pencil. If they like their pink pen, I don't really care. And so, their notebooks…when I flip through 'em are very…they are all very different. Give a graphic organizer, they'll look up there and, "Does it have to look like that?" I know…"Make it interesting." Or if I do a timeline, "Does it have to go one direction?" And, I give 'em like three different ways to do a timeline…And…say…but I just keep always throwing out there, "Just don't bore me with it and be creative." And…uh…someone will do it the standard boring way and do stuff and other ones just get carried away with that. And…uh…some of those are the ones that wouldn't want to be involved. But, it's the one who likes to sit there and draw. And as long as I am letting them draw and put all the color, they're happy to make…it's…you know usually that's someone…make do the best work in the class want to do that.

He was convinced that the flexibility and options he provided students regarding their notebooks, increased their creativity and their pride in their work.

P: They all look different, I guess. But, that gets 'em to work in it and they take ownership of it. 'Cuz then with all that different work in there…they keep up with 'em. And, they are always there. And at the end of the year…used to they'd just leave 'em. Now, you know, about a third of 'em want their notebook. They want to take them home with 'em because they got so much in there. And I…uh…don't have to…say, "Bring your notebook." Because they have their notebooks. And they seem to like 'em like that. I used to think maybe it's just a security thing. But now, I don't know…most of them are proud of the stuff they have in there. You know…maybe just the colors they used that day. Or, I don't know. They care more about it when I do it like that.

According to teachers in the study, students also care more about learning when strategies are used that engage all of their senses such as: they are moving, experiencing, touching, creating, communicating, collaborating, and they often connect emotionally to the learning. An example of an emotional connection to history was illustrated in the example Faith gave of a strategy she used with her elementary students.

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P: I think it has a lot to do with it. Um…You know…the kids these days, they are active and they can't just sit and read a book; out of the textbook. They need to be up. They need to be moving. They need to see. They need to…hands on experiences. (R: Um-hum) Um…And I think it's huge (R: Um-hum). You know…giving 'em any kind of hands-on activity that they can…that you can think of. Um…And one example was when we were studying…um…about how the…the king and queen of England were taxing the colonists in America,…um…they didn't…the kids were like, "Well, we don't understand why they were doing that." So, we got Smarties, Smarties candies and every…and we would come up with silly laws you know…and every time they broke one, they had to give us a Smartie. And so, just giving them that hands-on experience of seeing, "Ok. This is how it works." And they *got it*. It was really good because they understood about taxes and having to pay fees and that kind of stuff. (Participant started to continue but the researcher interrupted.)

Faith explained how her creative strategies helped students be more successful in

her social studies class.

P: It helps them visualize…you know…exactly *what* was happening (R: Um-hum) so they have a picture in their minds not just a picture in a textbook.

Miriam's definition of creativity was clearly at the foundation of the strategies

that she used with her students.

P: Creativity is something that comes…something that comes from the student's mind. It's natural. You know…it's engaging. It's real. (R: Ok.) It's real world experience. (R: Alright.) Hands on. I'm sorry. (R: Hands on.) It's also hands on.

Miriam gave a specific example of an experiential strategy in which not only

were the students actively involved but their parents were as well.

P: Put the kids into the…the…uh…figure….if we're teaching Native Americans, they…they can dress up as a Native American and act out the story. That's creativity to me. Make some….(Unintelligible.)...that puts the kids into the history. (R: Um-hum) An example is…uh…Jumanos…uh…they can dress up like Jumanos (R: Um-hum)…and act out this story. That's creativity to me. (R: Um-hum) And make those houses, you know (R: Ah-ha) that the Native Americans used…(R: Ah-ha)…and they have to be exposed to that (R: Yes.)…because it's not just to tell them…that this is what they lived…this is what they did. They need to be exposed to it. (R: Yes.) And, explore. Explore and put them into the history…(R: Yes.)…and they need to…uh…present…you

know…after they research. They need to present. And, also creativity to me is inviting parents and be part of their learning.

Outside of strategies that required advance planning such as the exercises offered by Faith and Miriam, once again the importance of flexibility and spontaneity was illustrated by Karen's example of diverting learning down a road of an impromptu inquiry.

> P: Often times…if a kid…if a student would ask me a question, typically most teacher's response when a student asks a question is they will hurry up and answer it or say, "Ask me later" or put them off or something like that. Whenever a student asks a question, another student should be able to answer it. If…if I'm truly doing my job as a teacher. So, I throw it out there to other students. Uh…does anybody have an answer or would anybody like to try to answer? And then, I'm always…I usually have a resident expert in there…and I'll say, "Maybe we can Google it. Somebody go Google it for me. Let's come up with an answer together." So, encouraging them not to see one person, one teacher has to have all the answers. Having them look for answers in other places is what I, I would…I did and I would encourage.

Again, Karen allowed for spontaneity in her classroom in this example and she felt that the strategy really made the students feel passionate about history. She cited an instructional strategy that was a student favorite.

> P: Uh…particularly, I'm thinking to American History and I'm thinking to point of view and getting students to understand, through the course of American History, the different participants' viewpoints on political issues and events that were happening was important to me because everything in history worked for a reason. And so my kids loved to do point and counterpoint. That was one of their favorite activities. And it was very spontaneous. And they were very, very passionate about what point they were taking and it often times had students saying, "You know, I never thought about it like that." So that was something that they really loved to do.

Karen went on to explain how she captured that teaching moment and used the point and counterpoint strategy with students.

P: I, I would throw out a statement and I would say, "Who wants to be King George III? Who wants to be Patrick Henry? Who wants to be a lowly colonist?" And kids would volunteer for roles and jump into the conversation and before long; every student in the room was somebody or doing their point of view about a particular statement.

Finally, Paige illustrated the importance of using strategies that were not only relevant to her high school students but that also were quite simply, fun! She explained how her students reacted to creative instruction.

P: They're more willing to do what you ask. I think. "Ah! This is cool. Let's try this! (Student voice) You know…and…um…like, for example we just learned about this little computer thing that you can do on their hand-held devices. It's called, Kahoot. Right? So, you make up a little quiz and it's got pictures…its got music. Everybody gets to pull out their phone. "What? We're allowed to use our phones right now?" (Deep student voice.) Excitement! (R: Laughs) And they get to put a little nickname in. And then they ask questions. And they get to pick. And it's a contest. And who's first? And, "Oh, my god! I'm so awesome!" I mean…they, they ask me almost everyday if they can play one. And I'm like, " I don't have one made." "Look one up, Miss! You can look on just the public ones!" (R: Laughs) They really like it!

In another example, she connected learning about history to students' use of social media.

P: One of the things I am gonna ask them to do is pick a famous person or an historical person we talked about. I give this copy of…um… of a cell phone…and…it's got…it says…um… "Tweets through history." So, in one hundred and forty characters or less, tweet something from this particular person. (R: Uh-huh) You know and, I've gotten some really *good ones* and I've gotten some really *strange ones*. (P: Laughs)

Regarding the last major theme (3) Strategies, teachers' responses indicated that learning should be important, relevant, spontaneous, require active engagement on the part of the student, anchored to ensure long-term learning, flexible, and fun. Their classroom experiences showed that with these goals in mind and when considering options of classroom strategies, there were greater opportunities for creativity to grow.

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Summary

All of the participants in the study believed creativity was important to their students. The teachers were open and eager to discuss their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs related to creativity. They all had professional experiences that influenced their advocacy for creativity in their urban schools. Teacher attitudes were deemed to be significant in stimulating creativity. All of the research participants shared experiences that also indicated the importance of the classroom environment as a place where strategies linked important learning to active student engagement. Finally, it was apparent that the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and practices encouraged the development of creativity both in themselves and their urban students.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

At this point, I would like to review the journey that I have made while undertaking this study. Initially, I set out to conduct a qualitative study examining the voices of six creative social studies teachers with experience in an urban school district. Specifically, through discourse, the purpose of the study was to seek an in-depth understanding of six urban teachers as creative people. The focus was on the relationship between their personal characteristics and creativity in the classroom. Honoring the various realities of the participants, I selected qualitative methodology in an effort to understand their individual experiences and the meaning they assigned to them. I understood the undividable connection between the knower and the known and the ways in which the researcher and the participants influenced one another.

In an effort to understand the experiences and practices of the six social studies teachers, I began with these research questions as guides for the study:

1. How do the selected urban teachers define creativity?

2. How do they encourage creativity in their students?

I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews in-person with each of the participants in order to investigate the questions. Along with the data collected from the interviews, I also investigated the questions using audio recordings, field notes, and non-verbal cues. After collecting the interview data, I transcribed it, compared it to the other

data and put them into categories using a system of color-coding for themes and subthemes.

I examined the relevant literature associated with the study of the creativity of teachers in urban school settings. My study began with an historical investigation of creativity in U.S. schools. I found that the relationship between creativity and education in our nation can be described as, "on again, off again" (Smith & Smith, 2010, p. 251). Educational priorities in U.S. schools have contributed to what has been described as a creativity crisis by Kim (2011). I also looked at creativity in urban schools is America and found that in spite of research indicating the need for developing the unrecognized potential in disadvantaged students (Bruch, 1975; Torrance, 1963; Torrance, 1966; Torrance, 1969), a set of acts labeled the "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman, 1991, p.291) is supported by multiple constituencies (Haberman, 1991). Creative positives that occur among disadvantaged students were identified (Torrance, 1969) yet research indicated there was a link between urban students whose creative needs are not met and them dropping out of high school (Kim & Hull, 2012)

I also looked at teacher perceptions of creativity and found that in spite of the role teachers have in a student's education; there has been a lack of research investigating teachers' views and perceptions of creativity and its development in students (Fryer & Collings, 1991). Researchers such as Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) found that teachers were positive about creativity, and they believed it to be an important educational goal (Feldhusen & Treffinger, 1975); however, over forty years of research runs contrary to that fact with results indicating that teachers dislike

students who display creative personality characteristics (Bachtold, 1974; Torrance, 1963; Westby & Dawson, 1995). In one study (Fleith, 2000) investigating perceptions of teachers and students regarding stimulants and obstacles for the development of creativity, components of the classroom environment such as teachers' attitudes, strategies, and activities were found to contribute to the development of creativity.

I considered those obstacles to creativity and found the statement, "creativity gets killed much more often than it gets supported" (Amabile, 1998, p. 77) to be indicative of the magnitude of the barriers standing in the way of creativity. Among them are teachers' feelings that they are inadequately prepared to deal with creativity because they had difficulty defining it, recognizing it, and appreciating it (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005). Also external constraints such as curricula, school schedules, and resources were reported to be barriers (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2001). In spite of those constraints, some teachers continued to emphasize the balance between structure and freedom in their stance toward teaching for creative learning (Craft et al., 2007).

In addition, I looked at the research on the stimulants of creativity in the educational setting. The literature showed environment to be an important variable in fostering creativity (Fleith, 2000), and Amabile (1998) presented a philosophical basis for a creative teaching environment that provided valuable insight. The environment was described as a place where learning is important and fun; students feel worthy, respected, and loved; students have a sense of pride and ownership and are actively involved in the learning process; teachers are engaged as advisers or coaches; and

students feel open to discuss problems . In my estimation, this description is the most thorough one that I found in that it includes all of the stimulants of creativity in the classroom.

Finally, I examined the research on creative teachers. According to Bramwell et al. (2011), "Good teaching is creative teaching, yet there is little research focusing on creative teachers themselves" (p. 228). In spite of that, they found the theme of personal characteristics to be a central one in the teachers' creativity. The personal characteristics they included were passionate, persistent, intrinsically motivated, knowledgeable, hard working, confident, energetic, and flexible. It was further stated that creative teachers use their personal intelligences to choose projects that align with both their values and the needs and interests of their students.

Summary

As the findings of the study were presented, the research questions served as a guide. The participants' definitions of creativity were focused on the needs of the students and discussed. The ways in which they encouraged creativity in their students included focusing on their own attitudes, the classroom environment, and the strategies they used. Detailed coverage of these points is discussed in the next section.

Discussion of the Findings

The first research question asked, "How do the selected urban teachers define creativity?" It did appear initially that being asked to define creativity challenged the participants; however, there responses did share the common thread of focusing on the student. Repeatedly, their answers included mention of the student or individual, the

student's need; the student's minds, a group of students, and involving and engaging students. Paul, one of the participants, summarized it best when he said he focused on what "would fit them the best" and he declared that freedom is probably, "one of the most important things" when it comes to creativity in the classroom. That response coupled with the common thread of targeting the needs of the student led to the theme of *Freedom to Focus on the Student* for the first research question.

The second research question asked, "How do they encourage creativity in their students?" Three major themes emerged: (1) *Importance of Teacher Attitude* with three subthemes: (a) *Authenticity*; (b) *Genuinely Cares about Students*; (c) *Genuinely Cares about Teaching*; and, (d) *Genuinely Values Creativity*; (2) *Environment* with the subthemes: (a) *Safe*; (b) *Flexible*; and (c) *Engaging*; and the final major theme (3) *Strategies*. Regarding the first major theme: *Importance of Teacher Attitude* as it related to encouraging creativity in their students, participants' comments showed how genuine they were with their students, as a result some of their responses were set forth as evidence for the first subtheme of (a) Authenticity. The participants appeared to be very authentic in the classroom. The next subtheme: (b) *Genuinely Cares about Students* emerged because the participants had a variety of ways to let their students know that they cared about them. It was also clear that the participants in this study were committed professionals and a few of their responses directly linked to the next subtheme, (c) *Genuinely Cares about Teaching*. Not only was there evidence that the teachers were passionate about their chosen profession but there was also evidence to support their beliefs that creativity had an important place in the classroom. As a result,

the final subtheme of (d) *Genuinely Values Creativity* emerged under the major theme of (1) *Importance of Teacher Attitude*. The participants in this study held attitudes that showed that they were authentic people in the classroom that showed their students that they valued them, teaching, and creativity.

The next theme to address the second question was (2) *Environment*. The first of the three subthemes specified that the environment be (a) *Safe*. This subtheme developed because the teachers' responses indicated that a safe learning environment was a priority to them. The participants' sensitivity to all of their students' needs and their willingness to leave space for their students to voice their opinions all established a nonthreatening environment within which their students creativity could be developed. Through their responses, they also described the environment as (b) *Flexible.* The participants established boundaries and rules and yet maintained flexibility within those boundaries. That balance made their classrooms creative spaces. Each of the participants described what an inviting learning environment looked like and their descriptions were explained as the final characteristic of the major theme (2) *Environment*, which is the subtheme (c) *Engaging*. Their responses about their classroom environments supported that characteristic.

Finally, the second research question, "How do they encourage creativity in their students? was associated with the activities teachers used and the way in which they were implemented. These responses were combined under the third major theme (3) *Strategies*. The strategies that the teachers used can be described as: pertain to important learning; relevant to students' lives; help anchor learning; engage students' senses

allowing them to move, experience, touch, create, communicate, collaborate, and often to connect emotionally with the learning; impromptu; fun, and the teachers were flexible in their delivery of strategies and their dealings with their students.

Conclusions

All of the teachers in the study believed that creativity was important. They also believed that it was important to their students and they accepted the responsibility of encouraging their students to be creative. The participants were open to discuss their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs related to creativity. They each had professional experiences that influenced their advocacy for creativity in their urban schools. Teacher attitudes were deemed to be significant in stimulating creativity. All of the research participants shared experiences that also indicated the importance of the classroom environment as a place where strategies link important learning to active student engagement. Finally, it was apparent that the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and practices encouraged the development of creativity both in themselves and their urban students.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on the findings of this study:

1. Teachers should receive training regarding creativity. Creativity should be included in the college curriculum preparing pre-service teachers and professional development should be provided on an ongoing basis for in-service teachers (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Cheung et al., 2003; Kampylis et al., 2009).

2. Stakeholders in the education of America's students need to be aware of the limitations to creativity related to external constraints such as curricula, school schedules, and allocation of resources (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Bramwell et al., 2011; Craft et al., 2007; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2001; Kampylis et al., 2009).

3. Opportunities for collaboration regarding teacher attitudes, the teaching environment, and teaching strategies would benefit teachers and administrators as they work together to foster creativity (Bramwell et al., 2011).

Implications for Future Research

1. There is a vast amount of literature on creativity in education; however, there is a lack of research investigating teachers' views and perceptions of creativity and its development in students (Fryer & Collings, 1991; Soh, 2000). As a result, this would be a rich area to develop in creativity research.

2. This study was centered around creativity in urban schools but it would be beneficial to pursue additional research in urban settings. It might include not only teacher interviews but also student interviews, classroom observations, and samples of creative products.

3. This study was conducted with six White teachers, one of whom was of Hispanic ethnicity. It would be beneficial to replicate this study by listening to the voices of more teachers of color.

4. This study focused on understanding urban social studies teachers as creative people. While four of the participants had experience with teaching subjects

other than social studies, it would be interesting to compare their views to those of urban teachers in other content areas.

5.   The participants in this research represented both elementary and secondary teaching experience in urban settings. In future studies, it would be interesting to add to the literature comparing the perceptions of creativity across the grade levels.

6.   Of the teachers in this study who were involved in preparing their students for state assessments, they reported that their students performed well. Since there is an emphasis in education on standardized assessments, it would be valuable to see the data from students who were prepared using creative methods rather than more traditional drill and practice test preparation methods.

It is my belief that the participants in this study were all creative people and exceptional teachers who were devoted to their urban students. They were given the pseudonyms *Faith-the-Flexible*, *Helen-the-Hardworking*, *Karen-the-Knowledgeable*, *Miriam-the-Motivated*, *Paige-the-Passionate*, and *Paul-the-Persistent* not only because they aptly described each of them, but also because these were among the characteristics of creative teachers (Bramwell et al., 2011). One purpose for embarking on this study was to describe how these teachers encouraged creativity in their students. What was found was that in spite of their differing personalities, they all shared attitudes that fostered creativity. They created classroom environments that did as well. And, they selected strategies and implemented them with flexibility that encouraged their students' creativity. As a result, their beliefs, their personal characteristics, and practices combined

to provide their urban students with an environment similar to the one described by Amabile (1998) as being one in which: students feel worthy, respected, and loved and they feel free to discuss problems; students are actively engaged in the learning process; and teachers are engaged as coaches, facilitators, or advisers, and learning is important and fun.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Creativity Through The Eyes of Social Studies Teachers In Urban Settings

Personal Information

1. Tell me something about yourself.

2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

3. Do you have experience teaching subjects other than social studies?

4. How many years of experience do you have in an urban district(s)?

Creativity

1. How do you define creativity?

2. What is your perception about teaching in an urban setting?

3. Have you experienced a district as it transformed from a suburban to an urban district?

4. If so, does creativity look different, as the district changed?

5. What does creativity have to do with school success and success beyond school?

6. How do you feel about male versus female creativity?

7. How do teachers believe parents are/are not engaged? Where do parents fit in?

8. If you have experience teaching at a career academy high school (middle school of choice or an elementary using discovery approach learning and curriculum) but you were previously another school, what differences do you see?